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# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Richard H. Eney: Swords and Sorcery	1
-------------------------------------	---

## THE HYBORIAN AGE

John D. Clark, P. Schuyler Miller, and L. Sprague de Camp: An Informal Biography of Conan the Cimmerian	9
John Boardman: Ocean Trade in the Hyborian Age	45
L. Sprague de Camp: Hyborian Technology	51
Lin Carter: The Real Hyborian Age	67
P. Schuyler Miller: Lord of the Black Throne	77

## ROBERT E. HOWARD'S FICTION

Poul Anderson: The Art of Robert Ervin Howard	85
L. Sprague de Camp: Memories of R.E.H.	91
Allan Howard: Conan on Crusade	99
Glenn Lord: A Gent from Cross Plains	107
L. Sprague de Camp: Editing Conan	113
Glenn Lord: Howard's Detective Stories	123
L. Sprague de Camp: Howard and the Races	127
John Pocsik: The Case for Solomon Kane	131
L. Sprague de Camp: Stirrups and Scholarship	139
Ben Solon: Howard's Cthuloid Tales	143

## HOWARD'S COLLEAGUES

Fritz Leiber: Controlled Anachronism	151
John Boardman: The Novels of Eric Rücker Eddison	171
Ray Capella: Hyborians, Be Seated (The Fantasy of A. Merritt)	177
L. Sprague de Camp: Mundy's Vendhya	183
Fritz Leiber: Titivated Romance	189

## THE COMPLETE SWORDPLAY-AND-SORCERY HERO

W. H. Griffey: Weapons of Choice, I	207
Albert E. Gechter: Weapons of Choice, II	211
Jerry E. Pournelle: On Weapons of Choice and/or Necessity	215
Jerry E. Pournelle: Son of Weapons of Choice and/or Necessity	219
L. Sprague de Camp: Range	227
Poul Anderson: Sublimated Bloodthirstiness	233
Leigh Brackett: . . . And as for the Admix- ture of Cultures on Imaginary Worlds	235
L. Sprague de Camp: Ranging Afterthoughts	243
Jerry E. Pournelle: Arming the Incomplete Enchanter	249
L. Sprague de Camp: The Complete Duelist	261
Jerry E. Pournelle: Rearming the Incomplete Enchanter	263
Poul Anderson: Richard the Lion-Hearted is Alive and Well in California	275

## THE HEROIC-FANTASY STORY

Marion Zimmer Bradley: . . . And Strange- Sounding Names	293
R. Bretnor: One Man's BEM	301

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This book and its companion volume, *The Spell of Conan*, are collections of articles having to do with heroic fantasy in general and with Robert E. Howard's famous hero Conan the Cimmerian in particular. Most of these materials are reprinted from *Amra*, the amateur magazine published since 1959 by George H. Scithers; a few come from other sources. All are printed in the form in which they originally appeared, save for a few minor editorial corrections, deletions, and changes.

I must apologize for the fact that my own contributions so far outnumber those of any one of my colleagues. The reason is not personal vainglory, but the fact that during the last twenty years I have contributed the largest number of pieces to *Amra* of any of Scithers's contributors. Writing for *Amra* (and occasionally for other fan magazines) is my busman's holiday and secret vice.

In any case, for those who like heroic fantasy without knowing much of its background, and for those who have heard of but never tried it, these volumes should be a useful and entertaining introduction to this beguiling genre of fiction and will enhance the fun the readers get from the stories.

L. Sprague de Camp





# INTRODUCTION

## SWORDS AND SORCERY

by  
RICHARD H. ENEY

THIS BOOK IS a collection of articles from *Amra*\*, a fanzine written mainly by members of the Hyborian Legion and, basically, devoted to Robert E. Howard's stories of a gigantic barbarian named Conan of Cimmeria. (Conan had used the *nom de guerre* of "Amra"—the Lion—when he was a captain of the Black Corsairs of Kush.)

*Amra*'s articles deal with what we call Heroic Fantasy, or sword-and-sorcery fiction—that kind of story in which heroes and villains may cast a spell or wield a blade with equal propriety, according to the terrain and the tactical situation: in a general sense, stories with pre-gunpowder technology in which magic works. In addition to their basic devotion, these stories touch on other heroes created by Howard; some other Conan-like

\*Plus two from other sources—L.S. de C.

heroic heroes written of different authors; and people in sword-and-sorcery settings who are principal characters without being exactly heroic about it.

Robert Ervin Howard of Cross Plains, Texas, was (until his suicide in 1936 at the age of thirty) a prolific writer in almost all the specialized areas of popular fiction: modern sport and detective stories, adventure yarns set against historical, oriental, or Wild West backgrounds, and weird or scientific fantasy. (He also wrote some fair poetry between whiles.) These he sold to the host of pulp magazines which were popular in the thirties, making a very fair income by Depression-era standards.

The all-fiction pulps were the dominant casual escape literature of Howard's time, though they have since yielded to the competition of cheap paperbacks and photo-mags. Outside the crime, sport, and air-war genres—their themselves rigidly stylized—the stories in these pulps had hardly any points of contact with the contemporary real world.

This was far from a handicap to a writer of Howard's characteristics. A native of a small town in the rural Southwest, he would have been as much out of his depth writing of labor unrest, appeasement, and New Deal politics as in treating of molecular biology. But he was a natural storyteller, with the storyteller's gift of creating a setting with half a sentence and a universe in rather less than a paragraph. His narratives are vivid and swift-flowing, and—though openly fantastic—compel us to suspend our disbelief by their gripping reality.

How?



For one thing, Howard, like many introverts, read widely both in fiction and history. In his stories he freely laid other authors under contribution, taking over attractive themes *en bloc* and reworking them on his own terms or creatively combining good ideas from several other stories. Thus Kathulos of Atlantis, with his exotic drugs, hypnotic power, Afro-Asian secret societies, and susceptible female agents is, line for line, Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu, although Steve Costigan is no fribblewitted Doctor Petrie. On the other hand Howard's posthumous novel *Almuric* knits together what seems to be a set of themes used by Edgar Rice Burroughs: the hero is transported magically to another planet like John Carter, hardened by outdoor life like Waldo Emerson Smith-Jones of *The Cave Girl*, and purged of his evil (gangster) past by Clean Living and Love like Billy Byrne in *The Mucker*. But our authors have gone into such derivations at greater length than I can do here.

This tracing of sources is an amusing pastime, but the skill with which Howard performed this sort of literary crosspollination is only a fraction of the explanation for his power as a writer or the zeal with which Amra's invincibly numerous contributors exhaust the resources of scholarship in study. What is more important is that Howard had the artist's power of visualization: the ability to conjure up solid images before his mind's eye, coherent and consistent in most of their parts, and then make the reader "see" what he "saw."

For no clear reason, this quality in an artist can fascinate readers as hypnotically as Thoth-Amon's most baneful and goëtic spell. Probably everybody knows how the Sherlock Holmes

stories are studied by the Baker Street Irregulars; in the last decade the same sort of thing has happened with the works of J. R. R. Tolkien—who set his exegetes the example by adding a series of fanzine articles to *The Lord of the Rings*. (He called them “appendices,” in order not to puzzle the Earth People, but we know . . . ) Thus it befell Howard, though not during his lifetime. Stfans of the thirties like John D. Clark and P. Schuyler Miller, and contemporary Big Names of the fantasy pulp field like H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, appreciated the Conan stories; Clark and Miller wrote the “Informal Biography of Conan the Cimmerian,” the archetypical *Amra* article, in the middle thirties, and Conan appears briefly in Miller’s burlesque fantasy *Alicia in Blunderland* (1933). But Howard’s stories remained essentially the private enthusiasm of some older fans with back files of *Weird Tales*, until the fifties.

Beginning in 1950 Gnome Press, one of the small science-fiction specialty houses which sprang up shortly after World War II, brought out a complete edition of the then known Conan stories under John D. Clark’s editorship. This was the foundation of the present-day Howard fandom, the Hyborian Legion, and, of course, *Amra*.

George Heap of Philadelphia actually founded *Amra* back in 1956 and brought out a few mimeographed issues before running into publishing problems. After a lapse of some two years, other hands took up the magazine, this time publishing in offset form. (For those of you who didn’t know, that’s why the current series of *Amra* has been “Volume II” for fifty issues: Heap’s *Amra* is Volume I.)

Amra, Volume II, Number 1 was modestly subtitled, "A magazine about Conan the Cimmerian and his Hyborian Age." But—like the Baker Street Irregulars when they started developing the points Doctor Watson had left out of his stories — Amra's contributors found it necessary to touch on every field which had the least connection with this primary subject. By taking up criticism and comment on all these things, Amra also has had to make room for the background-machinery of analysis, and that's what really expanded our coverage. It brought into Amra's pages all the collateral areas of interest from archaeology, bronzeworking, and cozenage through xenanthropology, yachting, and zymurgics. And not into Amra's pages alone, after Howard's fellow Texan Glenn Lord began publishing his excellent fanzine *The Howard Collector*, devoted more narrowly than Amra to articles, stories, and poems by and about Howard. (To get Amra, write to Amra, P.O. Box 8246, Philadelphia, PA, 19101.)

By right of these extended interests, Amra contributors now deal with almost anything—and in the past our topics have ranged from technology to Theosophy, from the wily East to the Wild West, and from before Atlantis to after the cooling of the sun; stopping at such way stations as the Theory & Practice of Masked Heroism, the ethics of peaceful coexistence with elves, and the chaos that Cabell, T. H. White, and Mark Twain made of the Middle Ages.

But now we're overrunning the purpose of a preface. I've tried to show the origin of these articles. For their nature, here they are to show you for themselves.



# THE HYBORIAN AGE



**AN INFORMAL  
BIOGRAPHY OF CONAN  
THE CIMMERIAN**  
by  
**JOHN D. CLARK,  
P. SCHUYLER MILLER,  
and L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP**

This essay first appeared in the form of an article called "A Probable Outline of Conan's Career," by P. Schuyler Miller and John D. Clark, published in a pamphlet, *The Hyborian Age*, by the Los Angeles-New York Cooperative Publications (a science-fiction fan group), Los Angeles, in 1938. Dr. Clark revised and expanded this article for the biographical paragraphs between stories in the Gnome Press cloth-bound series of Conan books, published 1950-54. Clark, Miller, and I further expanded the biography in the article, "An Informal Biography of Conan the Cimmerian," published in *Amra*, Vol. 2, No. 4. More recently I have further revised and expanded the composition for the biographical paragraphs between stories in the Lancer Books paper-bound series of Conan books, published 1966-69. The

*present version brings all the presently known biographical material together, up to 1969.*

L.S. de C.

THE GREATEST HERO in the history of the brilliant Hyborian civilization was not a Hyborian but, oddly enough, a barbarian, Conan the Cimmerian, about whose name whole cycles of legendry revolve. Little enough is known of his life, or of how he hewed his way to the throne of the greatest kingdom of the West; but the little that is definitely known is recorded here.

In Conan's veins flowed the blood of ancient Atlantis, swallowed by the seas eight thousand years before his time. He was born into a clan that claimed an area in the northwest of Cimmeria, along the shadowy borders of Vanaheim and the Pictish Wilderness. His grandfather was a member of a southern tribe who had fled from his own people because of a blood feud and who, after long wandering, took refuge with the people of the North. Conan himself was born on the battlefield, during a fight between his tribe and a horde of raiding Vanir.

There is no record to show when the young Cimmerian got his first sight of civilization, but he was known as a fighter around the council fires before he had seen fifteen snows. In that year the Cimmerian tribesmen, usually at each others' throats, forgot their feuds and joined forces to repel the Gundermen, who had pushed across the Aquilonian border, built the frontier post of Venarium, and begun to colonize the southern marches of Cimmeria. Conan was one of the howling, blood-mad horde that swept out of the northern hills, stormed over the stockade walls with sword



and torch, and drove the Aquilonians back across their frontiers.

At the sack of Venarium, still short of his full growth, Conan stood six feet tall and weighed 180 pounds. He had the alertness and stealth of the born woodsman, the iron-hardness of the mountain man, the Herculean physique of his blacksmith father, and a practical familiarity with knife, axe, and sword. After the plunder of the Aquilonian outpost—where he might have become acquainted with the wine and women of the Hyborian nations—Conan returned for a time to his tribe. Restless under the conflicting urges of his adolescence, his traditions, and his times, he spent some months with a band of Æsir in fruitless raiding against the Vanir and the Hyperboreans. This latter campaign ended with the sixteen-year-old Cimmerian in chains.

But he did not remain a captive long. Working at night while his fellow prisoners slept, he had ground away at one link of his chain until it was worn enough for him to break. Then, during a heavy rainstorm, he had burst loose. Whirling a four-foot length of broken chain, he had fought his way out of the Hyperborean slave pen and vanished into the downpour.

Although free, the youth found himself with half the breadth of a hostile kingdom between himself and home. Instinctively he fled south into the wild, mountainous country that separated the southern marches of Hyperborea from the fertile plains of Brythunia and the Turanian steppes. Pursued by a pack of wolves, who were starving at the end of a hard winter, he took refuge in a cave ("The Thing in the Crypt"). Here he discovered the shriveled, seated corpse of a nameless, gigan-

tic chieftain of former times, with a heavy sword across his kness. When Conan took the sword, the corpse arose from its throne and attacked him. Although Conan inflicted deadly wounds on the mummy, he could not slay what was already dead; but good luck and determination at last enabled him to destroy the shambling horror.

Continuing southward through the wild mountains that separated the eastern Hyborian nations from the Turanian steppes, Conan eventually came to Arenjun, the notorious Zamorian "City of Thieves." Green to civilization and wholly lawless by nature, he found—or carved—a niche for himself as a professional thief, among a people to whom thievery was an art and an honored calling.

Being still very young and more daring than adroit, his progress in his new profession at first was slow. Soon, however, he joined forces with Taurus of Nemedra in an attempt to filch the fabulous jewel known as the "Heart of the Elephant" from the seemingly impregnable tower of the infamous Yara, captor of the extraterrestrial god-thing, Yag-Kosha ("The Tower of the Elephant").

Becoming fed up with the City of Thieves (and vice versa), Conan wandered westward to the capital of Zamora, Shadizar the Wicked. Here, he hoped, the pickings would be richer. For a time he was, indeed, more successful in his thievery than he had been in Arenjun—although the women of Shadizar quickly relieved him of his gains in return for initiating him into the arts of love. Rumors of treasure sent him to the nearby ruins of ancient Larsha, just ahead of the squad of soldiers sent to arrest him ("The Hall of the Dead"). After all the squad but their leader, Captain Nestor, had

perished in a misadventure arranged by Conan, Nestor and Conan joined forces to plunder the treasure. After surviving fantastic perils, they escaped from an earthquake that leveled the ruins, but luck again robbed them of their gains.

Conan's recent adventures left him with an aversion to the sorcery of the East. He fled northward through Corinthia into Nemedia, the second most powerful of the Hyborian kingdoms after Aquilonia. In the city of Numalia, he resumed his professional activities with sufficient success to bring his abilities to the attention of Aztrias Petanius, the ne'er-do-well nephew of the local governor. This young gentleman, oppressed by gambling debts, hired the young outlander to steal a certain Zamorian goblet, carved from a single diamond, from the "museum" of the wealthy collector of and dealer in antiquities, Kallian Publico ("The God in the Bowl").

Unfortunately, Conan's appearance in the temple-museum coincided with its master's sudden departure from life and brought the young thief to the attention of Demetrio, president of the city's Inquisitorial Council. It gave him, also, his first experience with the dark magic of the serpent-brood of Set, drawn out of the far past by the Stygian sorcerer, Thoth-Amon, whose trail the Cimmerian was to cross again. When the terrible secret of the god in the bowl was at last made clear, Conan promptly left the spires of Numalia behind him.

Somewhat disillusioned about the possibility of avoiding supernatural obstacles to the orderly pursuit of his calling, and having made Nemedia much too hot to hold him, Conan drifted south again into Corinthia, where he continued to oc-

cupy himself with the unlawful appropriation of private property. He was about nineteen at this time, harder and more experienced if not more given to unprofitable caution than when he first appeared in the southern kingdoms.

By diligent application to his profession, Conan earned the reputation of being one of the two boldest thieves in the Corinthian city, but a lack of judgment as to the improbable behavior of women had him in chains when a turn in local politics freed him and opened a new career. An ambitious nobleman, Murilo, turned him loose to slit the throat of the Red Priest, Nabonidus, the scheming power behind the throne of that city-state ("Rogues in the House"). This venture brought a rare collection of rogues together in Nabonidus's house and ended in a grotesque mime of blood and treachery, with the Red Priest dead, Murilo at large, and Conan astride a fast horse on his way to the nearest border.

Conan had rather enjoyed his taste of Hyborian intrigue. It was clear to him that there was no essential difference between the motives and the opportunities of the palace and those of the Rats' Den, whereas the pickings were better in higher places. With his own horse under him and a grubstake from the grateful—and thoughtful—Murilo, the Cimmerian set out to look over the civilized world, with an eye to making it his oyster.

The Road of Kings, which wound through the Hyborian kingdoms, at last led him eastward into Turan, where he took service in the armies of the weakly amiable King Yildiz. He did not at first find military service congenial, being too self-willed and hot-tempered to submit easily to dis-

cipline. Moreover, being at this time an indifferent horseman and archer, in a force of which the mounted bowman was the mainstay, he was relegated to a low-paid irregular unit.

Soon, however, a chance arose to show his true mettle. King Yildiz launched a punitive expedition against a rebellious satrap of northern Turan, Munthassem Khan ("The Hand of Nergal"). By means of black sorcery, the satrap smashed the force sent against him. He had—so he thought—wiped out the hostile army from its highborn general, Bakra of Akif, down to the lowliest mercenary foot soldier. But young Conan alone survived. He lived to penetrate the city of Yaralet, which was writhing under the magic-maddened satrap's rule, and to bring a terrible doom on Munthassem Khan.

Returning in triumph to the glittering capital of Agrapur, Conan received, as a reward, a place in King Yildiz's guard of honor. At first he had to endure the gibes of his fellow troopers at his clumsy horsemanship and indifferent skill with the bow. But the gibes soon died away as the other guardsmen learned to avoid provoking a swing of Conan's sledgehammer fists, and as his skill in riding and shooting improved with practice.

Thus it came to pass that Conan was chosen, along with a Kushite mercenary named Juma, as one of the detachment sent to escort King Yildiz's daughter, Princess Zosara, to her wedding with Khan Kujula, chief of the Kuigar nomads of Hyrkania. The party was suddenly attacked in the foothills of the Talakma Mountains by a strange force of squat, brown, lacquer-armored horsemen ("The City of Skulls"). Only Conan, Juma, and the princess survived. They were taken over the

mountains and into the vast subtropical valley of Meru, and to the capital, Shamballah, the City of Skulls. The princess was destined to be the bride of Jalung Thongpa, the deformed little god-king of Meru. Conan and Juma were chained to an oar of the Meruvian state galley, which set off on one of its periodic circuits of the inland sea, the Sumeru Tso.

On the galley's return to Shamballah, Conan and Juma escaped and went by secret ways into the city. They reached the temple of Yama the Demon King just as the god-king was celebrating his marriage to Zosara. In the hurricane of violent and bloody action that followed, Conan learned the hideous truth behind the myths of Yama and his so-called descendant, Jalung Thongpa.

A month later, Conan and Juma delivered the princess, more or less intact, to her destined husband, the Khan, who rewarded them generously. Back at Aghrapur, Conan received a promotion to the rank of captain in the Turanian service. His growing repute as an irresistible fighter and a good man in a tight spot, however, instead of leading to soft jobs with large pay for little work, led King Yildiz's generals to choose him for particularly hazardous missions. One of these took him thousands of miles eastward, to fabled Khitai.

The purpose of this mission was peaceful and prosaic enough: to convey to King Shu of Kusan, a petty kingdom in western Khitai, a letter from King Yildiz proposing a treaty of friendship and trade between the two far-sundered realms. The wise old Khitan king entertained his visitors royally and sent them back with a letter of acceptance. ("The Curse of the Monolith," originally published as "Conan and the Cenotaph.") As a

guide, however, he appointed a foppish little nobleman of his court, Duke Feng, who had quite different objectives. As a leader of the faction implacably opposed to all contact with foreign devils, Feng sought to destroy the entire party without leaving a trace. He trapped Conan against a magnetic monolith haunted by an amorphous blob of living jelly, and only a fortunate oversight on the part of the duke enabled Conan to turn the tables.

Conan continued his service as a soldier of Turan for a total period of about two years, traveling widely and learning the elements of organized, civilized warfare. As usual, trouble was his bedfellow. After one of his more unruly episodes—said to have involved the mistress of the commander of the cavalry division in which he was serving—Conan found it expedient to desert from the Turanian army. Rumors of treasure sent him seeking for loot in Zamora ("The Bloodstained God").

In an alley of Shadizar, the capital, Conan was in time to retrieve a treasure map from a dying Nemedian, Ostorio, who had discovered the hiding place of a ruby-studded golden idol, deep in the Kezankian Mountains along the border between Zamora and Turan. Losing his map to the same gang of thugs that had knifed Ostorio, Conan trailed them to Arenjun, that same "City of Thieves" where he had served his apprenticeship six or seven years before. Picking up an Iranistani partner, Sassan, Conan had an unfortunate brush with Kezankian hillmen and had to join forces with the very rogues he was tracking. He found the treasure, only to lose it again under peculiar circumstances.

Fed up with magic, Conan rode for home. After a month or two of wenching and drinking, however, he grew restless enough to join his old friends the Æsir on a raid into Vanaheim ("The Frost Giant's Daughter"). In a bitter struggle on the snow-covered plains, both forces were wiped out—except for Conan, who wandered away to a strange encounter with the legendary Atali, beautiful daughter of the frost giant Ymir.

Haunted by Atali's icy beauty and bored with the simple life of the Cimmerian villages, Conan headed back towards the South and civilization. In crossing a pass in the Eiglophian Mountains, which formed the boundary between the northlands and the Border Kingdom, he chanced to rescue a young woman of the Virunian people, Ilga, from a tribe of cannibal submen ("Lair of the Ice Worm"). Through overconfidence, however, he soon lost the girl to the dreaded ice worm, a monster that haunted the glaciers of the heights. Honor compelled him to avenge the death of the girl on the unnatural creature. This, because of the peculiar metabolism of the monster, required unusual methods.

Conan then returned to the Hyborian kingdoms, where he served as a *condottiere* in Nemedia, Ophir, and finally Argos. In the last-named place, a misunderstanding with the law impelled him to take the first outward-bound ship ("Queen of the Black Coast"). This was the coastal trader Argus, headed for the black coasts of Kush. At this time, Conan was about twenty-four.

When he fled from Argos, Conan had no warning that a major epoch in his life was about to begin—one that would earn him a name by which he would be known and feared throughout the



black kingdoms of Stygia. The Argus was taken by Bêlit, Shemitish mistress of the Tigress, whose ruthless black corsairs had made her undisputed queen of the Black Coast. Conan won both Bêlit and a partnership in her bloody trade, ranging the coast with her until an ill fate took them up the black Zarkheba River to the lost city of an ancient winged race. Here Bêlit died horribly. As her burning funeral ship wafted out to sea, Conan turned inland to fight his way back through the black kingdoms to the Hyborian lands.

During his partnership with Bêlit, Conan gained the name of Amra, the Lion, which was to follow him all the rest of his life, and after her death he did not follow the sea again for several years. Instead, he plunged inland and joined the first black tribe that offered him shelter — the warlike Bamulas. In a few months he had fought and intrigued his way to the post of war chief of the Bamulas, whose power grew rapidly under his leadership.

The chiefs of a neighboring tribe, the Bakalahs, wished to make a treacherous attack upon one of their neighbors and invited Conan and his Bamulas to take part in the planned sack and massacre ("The Vale of Lost Women"). Conan accepted the invitation but, discovering that an Ophirean girl, Livia, was held captive in Bakalah, he outbetrayed the Bakalahs with the intention of rescuing Livia and taking her for his own. Livia fled during the slaughter and wandered into the mysterious vale of lost women, where only Conan's timely arrival saved her from being made a sacrifice to an extraterrestrial being. Then Conan's barbaric, paradoxical code of honor impelled him to send Livia home untouched.

Before he could bring off his plans for building a black empire with himself at its head, Conan was thwarted by a succession of natural catastrophes and the intrigues of his enemies among the Bamulas, many of whom resented the rise to power in their tribe of a pale-skinned foreigner. Forced to flee, he headed north through the equatorial jungle and across the grassy veldt towards the kingdom of Kush. After a narrow escape from pursuing lions, Conan took shelter in a mysterious ruined castle of seemingly prehuman origin on the veldt ("The Castle of Terror"). After a brush with a troop of Stygian slave-raiders and a host of malign supernatural entities that haunted the castle, Conan was fortunate in making his escape with the horse and the armor of one of the Stygians.

Continuing his northern trek, now speeded by his possession of a horse, Conan at last reached the semicivilized kingdom of Kush. This was the land to which the name "Kush" properly applied, although Conan, like other Northerners, tended to use the term loosely to mean any of the Negro countries south of the deserts of Stygia. Here an opportunity to display his prowess at once presented itself ("The Snout in the Dark"). In Meroë, the capital, Conan rescued from a hostile mob the young queen of Kush—the arrogant, impulsive, fierce, cruel, voluptuous Tananda. Soon Conan found himself involved in a labyrinthine intrigue between Tananda and an ambitious nobleman, Tuthmes, who had a piglike demon at his command. The plot was further complicated by the presence in Meroë of Diana, a Nemedian slave girl to whom Conan, to the fury of the jealous Tananda, took a fancy. Events culminated in a

night of insurrection and slaughter, while Conan fled with Diana.

Dissatisfied with his accomplishments in the black countries, Conan wandered northward across the deserts of Stygia to the meadowlands of Shem. During this trek, his reputation stood him in good stead. He presently found himself in the army of King Sumuabi of Akkharia, one of the southerly Shemitish city-states. He joined a band of volunteers from this army to liberate the neighboring city-state of Anakia. Through the treachery of one Othbaal, cousin of the mad King Akhîrom of Pelishtia, the volunteers were wiped out—all but Conan, who survived to track the renegade to Asgalun, the Pelishti capital (“Hawks over Shem”).

There Conan cast his lot, as much by chance as by choice, with a mysterious Hyrkanian horse-archer, who promptly involved him in a polygonal power-war involving the mad Akhîrom, the treacherous Othbaal, a Stygian witch, and a company of black mercenaries to whom Amra was a name of fear. In the final hurly-burly of sorcery, steel, and blood, Conan grabbed Othbaal’s red-haired Ophirean mistress, Rufia, and headed north.

Rufia’s interest seems to have lasted no longer than the loot Conan brought with him from Asgalun, or he may have traded her for a better horse before taking service under Amalric of Nemedra, mercenary general of Queen-Regent Yasmela of the little border kingdom of Khoraja (“Black Colossus”). Here Conan soon worked his way up to the rank of captain. Yasmela’s brother, the king of Khoraja, was a prisoner in Ophir, and her borders were assailed by nomadic forces gathered by a

mysterious veiled sorcerer, Natohk—actually the 3,000-years-dead Thugra Khotan of the forsaken desert city of Kuthchemes.

In obedience to an oracle of Mitra, the supreme god of the Hyborians, Conan was appointed captain-general of Khoraja's army. In this capacity he gave battle to Natohk's hosts and rescued Yasmela from the malignant magic of the undead sorcerer. In the final struggle of steel against sorcery, Conan won the day—and the queen.

Conan's pride, however, would not let him be "Mr. Queen" to any woman, no matter how beautiful or ardent. After a time, Conan slipped away to revisit his Cimmerian homeland and avenge himself on his old enemies, the Hyperboreans. Conan was now nearly thirty. His blood brothers among the Cimmerians and the Æsir had won wives and sired sons, some of them as old and almost as big as Conan had been when he first ventured into the rat-infested slums of Zamora. His experiences as a corsair and a mercenary had stirred the spirit of battle and plunder too strongly in his blood for him to follow their example. When traders brought word of new wars in the South, Conan rode back to the Hyborian kingdoms.

A rebel prince of Koth was fighting to overthrow Strabonus, penurious king of that far-stretched nation, and Conan found himself among old companions in the princeling's array. Unfortunately, the prince made peace with his king, and his mercenary force become unemployed. Its members, Conan among them, formed an outlaw band, the Free Companions, who harried the borders of Koth, Zamora, and Turan impartially. They finally gravitated to the steppes west of the

Sea of Vilayet, where they joined the ruffian horde known as *kozaki*.

Conan soon fought his way to the leadership of this lawless crew and ravaged the western borders of the Turanian Empire, until his old employer, King Yildiz, adopted a policy of massive retaliation. A force under Shah Amurath lured the *kozaki* deep into Turanian territory and cut them down in a bloody battle by the river Ilbars.

Slaying Amurath and acquiring the Turanian's beautiful captive, Princess Olivia of Ophir, Conan fled across the Vilayet Sea in a small boat ("Shadows in the Moonlight"). Taking shelter on a nameless island, the two came upon a ruined greenstone city inhabited by strange iron statues. The shadows cast by the moonlight proved to be dangerous, but Conan not only kept his own head but seized command of the pirate brotherhood who ravaged the Sea of Vilayet as their *kozak* allies dominated the neighboring steppes.

As chieftain of this mongrel Red Brotherhood, Conan was more than ever a thorn in King Yildiz's sensitive flesh. That henpecked monarch, instead of strangling his brother Teyaspa in the approved Turanian manner, had been prevailed upon to keep him cooped up in a castle deep in the Colchian Mountains, southeast of Vilayet, as a prisoner of the Zaporoskan brigand Gleg. To rid himself of another embarrassment, Yildiz sent one of Teyaspa's strongest partisans, General Artaban, to destroy the pirate stronghold at the mouth of the Zaporoska River. This he did, but became the harried instead of the harrier. With Conan and his pirate band in hot pursuit, Artaban headed inland, only to stumble upon the clue to Teyaspa's whereabouts ("The Road of the Eagles").

While more and more rogues and patriots mixed themselves into the affair, Conan followed a precarious "Road of the Eagles" to Gleg's castle, tangled with a brood of *brylukas* or Zaporoskan vampires in a Yuetshi necropolis, and was deserted by his doughty sea rovers. Appropriating one of the Hyrkanian stallions, he headed back to the steppes of his *kozak* friends. But he found the *kozaki* still scattered. Yezdigerd, now on the throne of Turan, was already proving himself a far more astute and energetic ruler than his late sire. He was submerging the fortunes and energies of would-be rivals in a program of imperial conquest, which would eventually make him master of the greatest empire of the Hyborian Age.

The Western kingdoms, however, were too much concerned with their own internal bickerings to pay much attention to this growing menace in the East. The small border kingdom of Khauran, between the eastern tip of Koth and the steppes and deserts over which the Turanians were methodically extending their control, was no exception. Arriving in Khauran, Conan soon won himself the command of the royal guard of Queen Taramis of Khauran ("A Witch Shall Be Born").

Here Taramis's twin sister, Salome, born a witch and reared by the yellow sorcerers of Khitai, had leagued herself with the adventurer Constantius of Koth to imprison the queen and take her place. Conan spotted the deception but was trapped and crucified. Taken down by the *kozak* chieftain, Olgerd Vladislav, the near-dead Cimmerian was carried off to a camp of the Zuagir tribesmen of the desert. Licking his wounds and biding his time, Conan used his ruthlessness and daring to make

himself Olgerd's right hand among the nomadic raiders.

Meanwhile, Salome and Constantius had begun a reign of terror and sorcery in Khauran, while one of Queen Taramis's faithful officers, suspecting the substitution, located the queen's prison. When, having deposed Olgerd, Conan led his Zuagirs against the Khauranian capital, the loyal underground rescued the captive queen from Salome's magic, even as Conan's blood-soaked riders pounded through the streets of the city. Soon Constantius hung from the cross where he had once nailed Conan, and Conan rode off to lead his Zuagirs to raid the cities and caravans of the Turanians.

Conan was then about thirty years old and at the height of his physical powers. He spent, altogether, nearly two years with the desert Shemites, first as Olgerd's lieutenant and then as their sole chieftain. The circumstances of his leaving the Zuagirs were long unknown, but a silken scroll written in Old Tibetan, recently brought out of Tibet by a refugee, tells the tale ("Black Tears").

The fierce and energetic King Yezdigerd, reacting strongly to Conan's pinpricks, sent out a strong force to entrap him. Thanks to a Zamorian traitor in Conan's own band, the ambush nearly succeeded, but the superior numbers of the Zuagirs and Conan's headlong leadership enabled them to defeat their attackers.

Burning to avenge the betrayal, Conan led his band in pursuit of Vardanes the Zamorian, who fled into the Shan-e-Sorkh, the Red Waste. Fearing that they would all perish in the rumored Maken-e-Mordan, the Place of Ghosts, the band deserted Conan while he lay in drugged slumber.

Awakening, Conan staggered on alone on the trail of Vardanes. After nearly perishing in the desert, Conan was rescued by Enosh, a chieftain of the isolated desert town of Akhlat, and his daughter Zillah.

When he recovered from his ordeal, Conan learned that for ages the city has suffered under the tyranny of a demon from Outside, who, in the form of a woman, lived on the life force of the living things in and near Akhlat. Such was the creature's appetite for this life-force that the region had gradually become barren and sterile, and the people and their domestic beasts were dwindling toward extinction. Vardanes had already become one of the demoness's victims, standing paralyzed in her temple.

Moreover, Enosh informed Conan, he was their destined liberator. Against his better judgment, Conan was persuaded to invade the temple. A last-minute inspiration enabled him to avoid the fate of his predecessors—petrification—and to free the city from its age-old curse. Although invited to remain and settle down in Akhlat, Conan, knowing himself to be ill-suited to the career of humdrum respectability held out to him, declined. Instead, he took Vardanes's horse and money and headed southwest to Zamboula, of whose facilities for pleasure he had long heard rumors.

Conan duly arrived in Zamboula, where he swiftly dissipated the small fortune he had brought with him in a colossal debauch. A week of guzzling, gorging, roistering, whoring, and gambling reduced him once more to destitution ("Shadows in Zamboula"). This westernmost of the Turanian outposts was ruled by the satrap,



Jungir Khan, and his Stygian mistress, Nefertari. But it was also infested by the night-running cannibal slaves from black Darfar. In the background lurked the sinister priest of Hanuman, Totrasmek, who sought a famous jewel, the Star of Khorala, for which the Queen of Ophir had offered a roomful of gold.

In the ensuing unpleasantness, Conan acquired the Star of Khorala and rode westward into the meadowlands of Shem. Whether he reached Ophir with it and claimed his roomful of gold or whether he lost it to some thief or light lady along the road, there is no record. At any rate, the proceeds cannot have lasted him very long. He paid another short visit to his native Cimmeria, finding old friends dead and old ways duller than ever. When word came that the *kozaki* had regained their old vigor and were making King Yezdigerd's life unhappy, Conan took his horse and his sword back to the harrying of Turan.

Although the northlander arrived all but empty-handed, he had old friends both among the *kozaki* and among the Red Fellowship of Vilayet Sea. Presently, sizable contingents from both groups were operating under his command and finding the pickings better than ever. Yezdigerd sent Jehungir Agha, lord of Khawarism, to set a trap for the barbarian on the mysterious isle of Xapur, near the pirates' Zaporoskan stronghold ("The Devil in Iron"). Coming early to the ambush, Conan found the island's ancient fortress-palace of Dagon restored by magic, and in it the ancient city's malevolent god, Khosatral Khel, a devil in iron if ever one lived.

Conan may or may not have made good his boast to burn Jehungir's city of Khawarism, but in

any event he built his combined *kozak* and pirate raiders into so formidable a threat that King Yezdigerd called off his march of empire to crush them. The Turanian forces were ordered back from the frontiers and in one massive assault succeeded in breaking up the *kozak* host. Some survivors rode east into the wilds of Hyrkania; others west to join the Zuagirs in the desert. With a sizable band, Conan retreated southward through the passes of the Ilbars Mountains to take service as light cavalry in the army of one of Yezdigerd's strongest rivals, Kobad Shah, king of Iranistan ("The Flame Knife").

Refusing to ride against the Ilbars hillmen who had befriended him after the retreat from Vilayet, Conan found himself in Kobad's bad graces and had to ride for the hills, taking one of the king's women, Nanaia, with him. He soon discovered that a conspiracy was brewing in the fortress city of the Hidden Ones. The Sons of Yezm were trying to revive an ancient cult and unite the surviving devotees of the old gods to rule the world. Their emblem was the "flame knife," which had been raised against the kings of Turan and Vendhya as well as against Kobad Shah. Their war chief was Conan's old enemy, Oigerd Vladislav—no man to let old sores heal.

The results were sanguinary, ending with the rout of all the forces involved by the gray ghouls of ancient Yanaidar, who returned to their hidden city. Conan was offered a pardon by Kobad's son and successor, Arshak, who wanted the Cimmerian's help against Yezdigerd's renewed incursions. Declining the offer, Conan rode east into the foothills of the Himelian Mountains, on the northwest frontier of Vendhya. Here he next ap-

peared as a war chief of the savage Afghuli tribesmen. He was now in his early thirties and known throughout the civilized and barbarian worlds, from Pictland to Khitai.

No man to be bothered with niceties, Yezdigerd used the magic of the wizard Khemsa, one of the dreaded adepts of the Black Circle, to remove the Vendhyan king from his path. The dead king's sister, the Devi Yasmina, set out to avenge him, but shortly became Conan's captive. With the help of Wazuli hillmen, the two pursued Khemsa, only to see him slain by the magic of the Seers of Yimsha, whom he had served. Conan was able to turn magic against magic, using his own steel to give him the advantage and rescuing Yasmina in time to ambush Yezdigerd's Turanian invaders and trounce them.

When his plans for welding the hill tribes into a single army failed, Conan rode back through Hyrkania and Turan, avoiding King Yezdigerd's patrols and sharing the tents of his former kozak companions. Big wars raged in the West and, scenting greener pastures and larger loot, Conan returned to the Hyborian kingdoms.

Almuric, prince of Koth, had rebelled against the hated King Strabonus. He raised a formidable army from far and wide, and Conan signed up with him. Strabonus's neighbors, however, came to his aid. The rebel cause failed, and Almuric's motley army was driven south. They cut their way through the lands of Shem, over the borders of Stygia, and into the grasslands of Kush. Here they were run down and wiped out by the combined black and Stygian forces at the edge of the southern desert. Conan was one of the few survivors.

Escaping into the desert, Conan and the camp

follower Natala came upon age-old Xuthal, a phantom city of living dead men and their creeping Shadow-god, Thog ("The Slithering Shadow"). The Stygian woman Thalís doublecrossed Conan once too often, and he and Natala made their escape across the desert to the southern grasslands of which Thalís had told him.

Conan eventually beat his way back to the Hyborian lands. Seeking further employment as a *condottiere*, he joined a mercenary army that a Zingaran, Prince Zapayo da Kova, was raising for Argos. Argos and Koth were at war with Stygia. The plan was that Koth should invade Stygia from the north, while the Argossean army entered Stygia from the south by sea. Koth, however, made a separate peace with Stygia, and the mercenary army was trapped in southern Stygia between two hostile forces. Again, Conan was among the few survivors. Fleeing through the desert with a young Aquilonian soldier, Amalric, he was captured by desert nomads while Amalric escaped ("Drums of Tombalku").

Amalric joined a trio of black Ghanatan brigands but later fell out with them over a captured white girl. In the resulting fracas, all the Ghanatans perished. Amalric took the girl, Lissa, to her native city of Gazal in the desert, whence she had fled. The Gazali were originally a scholarly community in Koth, driven out of that land by religious persecution. Then a cannibal god, Ollam-onga, took up residence in the city and devoured the people, whom it prevented by its hypnotic powers from fleeing.

During the night, Lissa vanished. Amalric sought for her in the Red Tower, where dwelt the god. Instead, he came upon the god in its mate-

rialized form and slew it in a desperate encounter. Reunited with Lissa, he fled the city, pursued by a squad of demons whom the god had summoned with its dying breath. The demons were routed by Conan, who since parting with Amalric had risen to commander of the cavalry of the city of Tombalku, still farther south.

In Tombalku, Amalric found that two kings ruled: Sakumbe, a Negro, and Zehbeh, of mixed blood. Sakumbe had known Conan before. Recognizing him, he had saved Conan from being burned at the stake and claimed the Cimmerian as a long-lost friend. The rivalry between the two kings boiled up, and in a brief struggle Zehbeh and his faction were driven out of the city. Sakumbe accepted Conan as his joint king. But Sakumbe's wizard, Askia, plotted against Conan; Zehbeh gathered his forces to attack Tombalku; and Askia slew King Sakumbe by magic for protecting Conan. Conan avenged his black friend and escaped from the city, with Amalric and Lissa, as the place was engulfed in civil war.

While Amalric and Lissa headed northward to the Hyborian lands, Conan made his way across the southern grasslands of the black kingdoms. Here he was known of old, and Amra the Lion had no difficulty in making his way to the coast, which he had ravaged in his days with Bêlit. But Bêlit was now only a memory on the Black Coast. The ship that eventually hove in sight off the headland where Conan sat whetting his sword was manned by pirates of the Barachan Isles, off the coast of Zingara. They, too, had heard of Conan and welcomed his sword and experience.

Now about thirty-five, Conan joined the Barachan pirates, with whom he remained for some

time. To Conan, however, accustomed to the tightly organized armies of the Hyborian kings, the organization of the Barachan bands appeared so loose that there was small opportunity to rise to leadership and its rewards. Slipping out of an unusually tight spot in the pirate rendezvous at Tortage, he found that the alternative to a slit throat lay in an attempt to row the Western Ocean in a leaky little skiff. This he did with complete confidence and perfect aplomb. When he sighted the *Wastrel*, the ship of the Zingaran buccaneer Zaporavo, he abandoned his sinking boat, swam to the ship, and nonchalantly climbed aboard ("The Pool of the Black One").

The Cimmerian soon won the respect of the crew and the enmity of its captain, whose Kordavan mistress, the sleek-limbed Sancha, was casting too friendly an eye on the black-maned giant. Haunted by legends of the past and poring over ancient charts, Zaporavo drove his ship ever westward, until at last they made a landfall on an unknown island. Here the Zingaran lost his life in a duel with Conan, and Sancha was carried off by strange black giants. Trailing her to the weird Pool of the Black Ones, Conan also succeeded in rescuing the crew of the *Wastrel*. Thence he set sail for the vulnerable ports and merchantmen of friendlier waters.

For two years, as captain of the *Wastrel*, Conan continued a successful career as a freebooter. The details of his operations are not presently known, although it is hoped that a set of clay tablets, inscribed in pre-Sumerian cuneiform, may contribute to our knowledge of this period when they have been deciphered.

Other Zingaran pirates, however, jealous of the

outlander in their midst, at last brought him down off the coast of Shem. Escaping inland and hearing that wars were in the offing along the borders of Stygia, Conan joined the Free Companions, a band of *condottieri* under the command of Zarallo. Instead of rich plunder, however, he found himself engaged in uneventful guard duty in the border post of Sukhmet, on the frontier of the black kingdoms. The wine was sour and the pickings poor, and Conan soon tired of black women. His boredom ended with the appearance in Sukhmet of Valeria of the Red Brotherhood, a woman pirate whom he had known in his Barachan days. When she took drastic measures to repulse a Stygian officer, Conan followed her south into the lands of the blacks ("Red Nails").

Deep in the forest, a dragon devoured their horses. Although Conan poisoned the monster, the pair thought it wise to take refuge in a seemingly abandoned city on the plain beyond the jungle. This city, Xuchotl, they found occupied by the feuding clans of Xotalanc and Tecuhltli, people of Tlazitlan stock who had come thither half a century before from the shores of Lake Zuad, on the borders of Kush.

Siding with the Tecuhltli, the two northerners soon found themselves in trouble with the ageless witch, Tascela, and the magic of the ancient Kosalans who had built the city. Conan was willing enough to help the Tecuhltli to drive red nails into their ebony "pillar of vengeance," one nail for the life of each slain Xotalanca. But he had small liking for the ophidian Crawler, which the hostile clan had brought out of the city's black crypts. When the feud ended in bloody carnage, he was

glad enough to leave this haunted city.

Conan's amour with Valeria, however hot at the start, did not last long. Perhaps the fact that each of them insisted on being the boss had something to do with the fact. At any rate, they parted: Valeria to return to the sea, Conan to try his luck in the black kingdoms. Hearing of the priceless "Teeth of Gwahlur," a fortune in ancient jewels hidden somewhere in Keshan, he sold his service to the irascible king of Keshan to train his armies for war against the neighboring kingdom of Punt ("Jewels of Gwahlur").

The scheming Tuthmekri, the Stygian emissary of the kings of Zembabwei, also had designs on the jewels of Gwahlur and began to cut the ground from under his competition—Conan. The Cimmerian made tracks for the crater valley where the ancient city of Alkmeenon and its treasures were supposedly concealed. Here in a wild adventure with the undead goddess Yelaya, the Corinthian girl Muriela, the black priests headed by Gorulga, and the grim gray servants of Bît-Yakin, the long-dead Pelishti, Conan kept his life but lost the jewels.

Heading for Punt with Muriela, Conan carried out a scheme for relieving those worshipers of an ivory goddess of some of their abundant gold. He then continued to Zembabwei. In the city of the twin kings he joined a trading caravan, which he squired northward along the desert borders—borders patrolled by his onetime Zuagir marauders—bringing it safely into Shem. He continued northwards across the Hyborian kingdoms to his bleak homeland.

Conan was now in his late thirties, with few signs of his years save a more deliberate approach



to wenching and the pursuit of trouble. Back in Cimmeria, he found the sons of his contemporaries raising families in their turn and tempering their northern hardihood with little luxuries, which filtered up from the softer Hyborian lands. Even so, no Hyborian colonist had crossed the Cimmerian borders since the destruction of Venarium, more than two decades before.

Now, however, the Aquilonians were spreading westward through the Bossonian Marches into the fringes of the Pictish Wilderness. So thither, seeking work for his sword, went Conan. He enrolled as a scout at Fort Tuscelan, the last Aquilonian outpost on the east bank of the Black River, deep in Pictish territory. Here a fierce tribal war with the Picts was in progress ("Beyond the Black River").

In the forests across the river, the wizard Zogar Sag was gathering his swamp demons—children of Jhebbal Sag, the ancient forest god—to aid the Picts. Conan was unable to prevent the destruction of Fort Tuscelan with its entire garrison, but he did succeed in warning the settlers at Velitrium, beyond Thunder River, and in indirectly slaying Zogar Sag.

After the fall of Fort Tuscelan, Conan rose rapidly in the Aquilonian service. Becoming a general, he defeated the Picts in a great battle at Velitrium and broke the back of their confederacy. Then he was called back to the capital, Tarantia, for a triumph. But, having aroused the suspicion and jealousy of the depraved and foolish king Numedides, he was plied with drugged wine and chained in the Iron Tower under sentence of death.

But the barbarian had friends as well as enemies

in Aquilonia. Soon he was spirited out of his prison and turned loose with a horse and a sword. Riding back to the frontier, he found his Bossonian troops scattered and a price on his head. Swimming Thunder River, he struck out across the dank forests of Pictland toward the distant sea.

In the midst of the forest, Conan came upon the cavern that concealed the corpse and treasure of the Barachan pirate Tranicos and fought free of its guardian demon ("The Treasure of Tranicos," originally published as "The Black Stranger"). Meanwhile, from the west, others were hunting the same fortune: Count Valenso, a Zingaran refugee with his niece Belesa; rival bands of Barachan and Zingaran pirates; and a mysterious "black man," who turned out to be the Stygian sorcerer, Thoth-Amon, whose trail had crossed that of Conan before. Finally the Picts closed in, and Conan was lucky to escape with Belesa and his life.

Before the Picts could hunt him down, Conan was rescued by a war galley carrying old friends from Aquilonia, who sought his leadership in a revolt against Numedides. The revolution progressed with hurricane speed. While knights and sergeants in gleaming mail clashed in charge and countercharge on the Aquilonian plains, civil war raged along the Pictish frontier between the partisans of Conan and those of Numedides. The Picts, naturally, saw their opportunity. The story "Wolves Beyond the Border" tells how Lord Valerian of Schondara, a partisan of Numedides, schemed to bring the Picts down upon the town of Schohira; how a scout from Thandara, Gault Hagar's son, tried to upset this scheme by killing the Wizard of Ghost Swamp, who furnished the

Picts with supernatural means of attack; how Gault was captured but escaped and turned the Picts' magic upon themselves.

Storming the capital city and slaying King Numedides on the steps of his throne—which he promptly took for his own—Conan, now in his early forties, found himself king of the greatest of the Hyborian nations. A king's life, however, proved no bed of houris. Within the year, the mad minstrel Rinaldo was chanting ballads in praise of the "matyred" Numedides. Ascalante, Count of Thune, was gathering a group of plotters to topple the barbarian from his throne. Conan found the people had short memories and that he, too, suffered from the uneasiness of head that goes with a crown ("The Phoenix on the Sword"). He might have lost both to the sorcery of his old adversary, Thoth-Amon, had not Aquilonia's ancient guardian, the sage Epemitreus, risen from his secret tomb after 1,500 years to trace a magical phoenix on the Cimmerian's sword, thus enabling Conan to destroy the Stygian's diabolical sending.

No sooner had the mutterings of civil war died down than Conan received an urgent plea for help from Aquilonia's ally, King Amalrus of Ophir. King Strabonus of Koth was demonstrating against Ophir's borders, and Conan rode to the rescue with five thousand of Aquilonia's bravest knights, to find both kings treacherously allied against him on the plain of Shamu. The Aquilonians died fighting to the last man, and Conan himself was taken alive through the wiles of the Kothian wizard Tsotha-lanti, the evil brain behind the plot. ("The Scarlet Citadel").

A prisoner in the wizard's red tower in the Kothian capital of Khorshemish, the "queen city of the

South," Conan escaped when his black jailer tried to avenge himself on the onetime Amra, corsair of the Black Coast of Kush, who had killed the man's brother in the sack of Abombi. In Tsotha's vaults, Conan came upon and released a prisoner who turned out to be the Kothian's wizardly rival, Pelias. Through Pelias's counter magic, Conan was transported to Tarantia in time to overthrow a pretender, Arpello, and to lead an army against Strabonus and Amalrus. Both kings died in the battle under the walls of besieged Shamar, on the banks of the Tybor, and Tsotha lost his head to the sweep of Conan's sword.

For nearly two years thereafter, Aquilonia flourished under Conan's firm but tolerant rule. The lawless, hard-bitten adventurer of former years had, through force of circumstance, gradually matured into an able and responsible statesman. But a plot was brewing in the neighboring kingdom of Nemedi, and the plotters planned to bring down the king of Aquilonia by means of the sinister sorcery of an elder day.

At this time, Conan was about forty-five years old, showing few signs of age save the countless scars that crisscrossed his mighty frame and a more cautious, deliberate approach to wine, women, and bloodshed than had been the case in his uproarious youth. Although he kept a harem of luscious concubines, he had never taken an official wife—a queen—and hence had no legitimate son to inherit the throne. His enemies meant to take full advantage of this fact.

The plotters resurrected Xaltotun of Python, the greatest sorcerer of the ancient empire of Acheron, who fell with it when the Hyborian savages poured out of the North three thousand years be-

fore. By Xaltotun's magic, King Nimed of Nemedia was slain and replaced by his younger brother Tarascus ("Conan the Conqueror," originally published as "The Hour of the Dragon"). Conan's army was defeated by black sorcery, Conan was imprisoned, and the exile Valerius was placed on his throne. Conan's supporters Prospero, Pallantides, and Trocero became fugitives in the backlands.

Escaping from the sorcerer's dungeon with the aid of the harem girl Zenobia, Conan returned by stealth to Aquilonia to rally his loyal forces against Valerius and the Nemedians who occupied his kingdom. From the priests of Asura, he learned that Xaltotun's power could be broken only by means of a strange jewel, the "Heart of Ahriman," which had been stolen from Xaltotun and hidden by Tarascus. Setting out to find this jewel, Conan was impressed into service on an Argossean merchant ship, only to lead an uprising of black slave rowers and resume his old role of Amra, the Lion. The trail of the jewel led to the black walls of Khemi, the chief port of Stygia. Winning back the jewel, Conan returned to Aquilonia, joined forces with his faithful friends, and destroyed Xaltotun through the power of the Heart of Ahriman.

Having defeated the invaders and regained the throne of Aquilonia, and having dismissed his concubines and found other protectors for them, Conan made Zenobia his queen. But his return to his capital left evil forces arrayed against him. A year after the reunification of the kingdom, at the great ball celebrating Zenobia's elevation to the throne, the queen was carried off by a winged demon sent by a Khitan sorcerer, Yah Chieng,

whose acolytes had ineffectually tried to aid Valerius against Conan ("The Return of Conan").

Conan's quest carried him across the known world. Aided by the far-seeing magic of Pelias, the Kothian wizard, Conan followed the trail eastward. He shared the tents of his former Zuagir comrades and slew Yezdigerd of Turan in a furious battle on the Sea of Vilayet. In Vendhya, he helped the Devi Yasmina to put down a palace plot, then sought the aid of Khirguli hillmen to set him on his way through the Himelian passes to Khitai. He encountered the snow demons of Talakma on the way.

Disguised as one of the Lion Dancers at Yah Chieng's festival of conquest, Conan entered purple-towered Paikang at last. Here he liberated a group of his old mercenary companions. With the aid of the magical ring of Rakhamon, given him by Pelias, and of Crom, his half-forgotten Cimmerian god, he freed Zenobia and broke the back of the Khitan wizard.

Hitherto the chronicles have had little to say about Conan's later adventures, albeit there is reason to suspect that a recently discovered Old Kingdom papyrus may help to fill in the details. (Because half of this papyrus is in Cairo and half in Jerusalem, this may take some time.) It is, however, known that, with Aquilonia's strongest barons, led by Trocero and Prospero, firmly behind him, and with the great mass of the people loyal to him and his dynasty, the way grew smoother. Zenobia gave him heirs, and there were friendly monarchs on the thrones of neighboring kingdoms. True, the savage Picts resented and resisted the constant pressure against their forest fastness, but that was to be expected.

Conan fought a great war in these later years. A set of Zingaran adventurers, backed and perhaps instigated by Stygian gold and sorcery, struck southward into Argos, seized Messantia and the eastern provinces of that merchant kingdom, and then began to harry the fringes of Poitain. Conan's retaliation was swift, and his lion banner was carried relentlessly westward across Zingara to the sea. Before the war was done, he may have had to carry it for one last time to the very door of his ancient enemy, Thoth-Amon, in the heart of Stygia.

At least twice more, it is told, Conan's restless spirit carried him to lands beyond the known world, farther than any of his northern blood had ever gone. Far in the South, beyond the black kingdoms, were the grim wastes where the last remnants of that pre-human race that once held Stygia had founded a bleak kingdom. Though their venomous blood had run in his veins, Thoth-Amon had used their foul sorcery to keep them at bay while he worked his will against the Hyborian world.

With the Stygian dead, they began a new assault against the human world. In their terror, the kings of the black nations turned to their old enemy, and it was as Amra, the Lion, that Conan led the spearmen of Punt and Zembabwei and Atlaia in a triumphant onslaught of blood and magic. Beside him, they say, rode the gigantic black queen of the almost mythical Amazons, and it was with her that Conan left most of the fabulous treasure of the gray citadel.

Then, for several years, Conan's rule was relatively peaceful. His old foes Thoth-Amon and Yezdigerd were no more, and turbulent Zingara

had been reduced to a quiet client kingdom under the rule of Conan's docile puppet.

But the years relentlessly passed. Zenobia, Conan's beloved consort, died in childbirth. Time did that which no combination of foes, human or inhuman, had been able to do to Conan. His skin became wrinkled and his hair, grizzled. His thews, though still mighty, became a little stiff and lost some of their iron endurance. His old wounds ached in damp weather.

After Zenobia's death, Conan found the routine of a peaceful reign increasingly irksome. He haunted the royal library, finding in dusty scrolls and crumbling codices strange accounts of lands beyond the Western Ocean. He spent time with his children, but the yawning gap in age—he was in his sixties, while they were still infants and adolescents—made it hard for him to reach any true intimacy with them.

Then a sudden catastrophe shattered his mood of vague, half-resigned discontent. His old friend and supporter, Count Trocero of Poitain, was suddenly seized in the Hall of Justice by supernatural entities, the Red Shadows, and whisked away ("Conan of the Isles"). During the following months, hundreds of Aquilonian subjects were similarly carried off. Conan's strenuous efforts to find the cause of this visitation were unavailing, until in a dream he again visited Epemitreus in the heart of Mount Golamira. The sage advised him to abdicate in favor of his son, Prince Conn, and set out at once to cross the Western Ocean.

Traveling incognito, Conan reached Messantia, where he encountered an old comrade of his piratical days, Sigurd of Vanaheim. He also came to the



attention of the shrewd young king of Argos, Ariostro, who furnished him with a fine ship for his quest. He picked up a crew in the Barachan Isles and sailed on and on across the trackless wastes of the ocean.

The Red Shadows had been dispatched by the priest-wizards of Antillia, a chain of large islands off the coast of the transoceanic continents, whither the survivors of the sinking of Atlantis had fled eight thousand years before. The purpose of the priesthood was to obtain human sacrifices for their devil-god Xotli, since their own population was becoming depleted by these rituals. Approaching the islands, Conan's ship was set upon and captured by the Antillians, who immobilized the crew with an anesthetic gas. Conan escaped by diving overboard with a breathing apparatus taken from one of the boarders, and by which he reached the shore by walking on the bottom.

Stealing into the city of Ptahuacan, Conan found shelter in the hut of a harlot and made contact with the local underworld. After nightmare conflicts with giant rats and with dragons in the tunnels beneath the city, Conan emerged on the sacrificial pyramid just as the sacrifices of his crew were about to begin. Conflict natural and supernatural, revolution, and seismic catastrophe all ensued in quick succession. In the end, Conan left Ptahuacan under the rule of the master thief, Metemphoc, and sailed off in a splendid Antillian war galley to explore and perhaps to conquer the unknown continental realms to the west.

Whether he died there, or whether there is truth in the tale that he came striding out of the western wastes to stand at his son's side in a last battle

against the foes of Aquilonia, will be known only to one who looks, as Kull of Valusia once did, into the mystic mirrors of Tuzan Thune.

# **OCEAN TRADE IN THE HYBORIAN AGE**

by  
**JOHN BOARDMAN**

Page references are to the Lancer or Ace edition of the Conan canon. Abbreviations are: QC = "Queen of the Black Coast"; HS = "Hawks Over Shem"; PO = "The Pool of the Black One"; TT = "The Treasure of Tranicos"; CC = "Conan the Conqueror."

Predatory beasts are greatly outnumbered by the animals on which they prey. This is necessarily true, for otherwise the carnivores will finish off the available food supply, and then themselves die out. The same theorem holds for predatory men and their victims. Only well-traveled caravan routes and sea-lanes are frequented by raiders, and if they are too great in number, traffic will decrease to the point where the proceeds will no longer support them.

It is interesting to apply this idea of "ecological balance" between raiders and raided to the Hy-

borian Age. During his years of wandering, Conan showed a preference for associating with desert or hill bandits, or with pirates on the Western Sea or the Sea of Vilayet. This presupposes sufficient trade in those regions so that shipowners and merchants would still consider the profits of such a journey worth the risk of encountering marauders.

The western world during the Hyborian Age consisted of a single great land mass, with no inland seas except the land-locked Vilayet. Under these circumstances, land traffic would be the usual means of transportation for men and goods. However, since costs of shipment are usually less by sea than by land, it is reasonable to suppose that the Sea of Vilayet would have been much used to transport merchandise among the various provinces of Turan, or between Turan and the independent Hyrkanian states to the northeast.

This leaves the Western Sea to be considered. It is well known that the trade on this ocean was enough to support no fewer than three different groups of robbers, all of whom Conan sailed with at one time or another—the pirates of the Baracha Isles, the buccaneers or freebooters of Zingara, and the Negro corsairs of the far southern islands (CC 137).

The Barachan pirates were mainly Argosseans, who from their strongholds off the Zingaran coast harried the shores and shipping of other nations, principally Zingara (PO 193f). The freebooters sailed under letters of marque from the King of Zingara, and preyed principally upon Argossean ships, but were known to raid the shores of their own homeland as well (PO 193f, TT 39f). The corsairs were Negroes of the southern islands,

who like the Barachans lived entirely by piracy (CC 160). However, Kushites and other mainland Negroes also sailed among them, and apparently whites such as Bêlit and Conan could rise to command on the corsair ships.

The Barachans and the freebooters served respectively as Argossean and Zingaran forces in the ancient and bitter cold war that existed between these kingdoms (PO 193f, TT 39f, CC 137). The black corsairs were outside the rules of all "civilized" warfare, and spared no man on their victims' ships, a practice not followed either by the raiders of the northern waters or by the pirates of the Sixth Age's West Indies. However, their depredations did not seem to extend north of the seas around Kush. Stygia was apparently too strong for all but the greatest captains, and Amra is the only leader under whom they are recorded as far north as Shem (HS 45). Nor are the Barachans and the freebooters heard of in the waters south of Stygia.

But on what trade did these raiders live? The Vanir had not yet acquired the seafaring skill for which their distant descendants were to become famous, and only rumors of fantastic treasure could bring ships to the bleak Pictish coast, which extended from Zingara north to the Arctic (TT 21). The vicious Picts would attract no traders, and are not recorded as dealing commercially with other peoples.

Trade in the Western Sea, then, would consist only of coastwise shipping from Zingara and Argos past Shem and Stygia to the black kingdoms. Not all of these nations were always open to foreign merchants. Zingara was frequently racked by civil war, and the exchange of war material for loot cannot compare in volume or value with

peacetime commerce. The Shemite city-states had no fleets of their own, nor was there much trade with them (QC 86). (Either Conan or his court scribe held a common prejudiced belief concerning the Shemitic peoples: "There was scant profit in trade with the sons of Shem.")

Except for rare and uneasy periods of truce (CC 142f), Stygia was also closed to foreign commerce. In fact, Stygian war galleys were another hazard that merchants had to face on their southern voyages. Stygian raids were probably not so much for loot as to protect Stygia's position as middleman for the flow of southern raw materials which were carried to northern ports to be sold, or exchanged for the finished goods of the more civilized nations (CC 140). The Stygians, who were not greatly interested in foreign dealings, kept this trade at a low level in order to maintain high prices. Naturally the Argosseans, the Venetians of the Hyborian Age, would be anxious to deal directly and in greater volume. Some Mes-santian merchants even went one step further and bought these goods surreptitiously from the corsairs who raided the coasts of the southern kingdoms and the ships which traded with them.

However, even with the Kush-Argos coastal trade, the total value of goods shipped by sea must have been small compared to overland trade among the Hyborian kingdoms and their eastern and southern neighbors. Would there have been enough shipping on the Western Sea to "support" three separate and rival groups of raiders (two of whom had no other source of income) and at the same time enrich the great merchants of Mes-santia and provide for the prosperity of that city and the other Argossean ports?

Several theories suggest themselves as answers to this riddle. For one thing, the Barachans were mostly exiles from their own lands, and, being unable to return home, were forced willy-nilly into piracy no matter how slim the pickings. Kushites joined the corsairs for the same reason, or, because, as former galley slaves, they were loath to return to their jungle villages and sought revenge on the sea against their former masters.

Also, the Barachans and the freebooters may have been directly subsidized by the governments of Argos and Zingara respectively. The Zingaran letters of marque issued to the freebooters were a thinly disguised effort of Zingara to live by piracy off the merchant fleet of Argos, rather than deal or compete with the more commercial-minded Argosseans in trade. This proved to be a two-edged weapon for the Zingarans, and may have contributed to the chronic internal turmoil of that unhappy land. For the freebooters, lacking any firm control from the weak and faction-ridden court, often turned their swords against the ships, coastal towns, and castles of their own land.

Piracy was also used by Argos as a counter-measure against Zingaran privateering. An Argossean cash subsidy and the use of Argossean port facilities would explain why the Barachans did not trouble Argossean shipping (CC 137); certainly they were strong enough to do it severe damage had they desired.

Finally, we know from both Viking and West Indian history of the Sixth Age that pirates found shore raids far more profitable than ventures against commercial shipping. The coastal lands of Zingara and Kush were frequently raided, and under bolder and abler leaders Shem and even

Stygia did not escape these marauders. Probably the black corsairs obtained the bulk of their plunder from the coasts of Kush and the other mainland Negro kingdoms. They may also have dealt in slaves taken on these raids.

Under such circumstances, the Western Sea would have been safe enough for Argossean merchants to engage in the commerce between North and South that made Messantia a natural transshipment point between the river traffic of the Khorotas and the seagoing ships. By judicious direct and indirect subsidizing of piracy, the efforts of all but the boldest sea bandits could be diverted against other victims. No doubt Conan would have split the skull of anyone who suggested that he was a pawn (or, at best, a rook) in the plans of the Messentian bourse, but then anyone shrewd enough to realize this would have been too wise to make such an observation in the Cimmerian's presence.



# **HYBORIAN TECHNOLOGY**

by  
**L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP**

In referring to stories in the Conan saga, the following abbreviations are used: TE = "The Tower of the Elephant"; GB = "The God in the Bowl"; RH = "Rogues in the House"; FD = "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"; QC = "Queen of the Black Coast"; BC = "Black Colossus"; SM = "Shadows in the Moonlight"; WB = "A Witch Shall Be Born"; SZ = "Shadows in Zamboula"; DI = "The Devil in Iron"; PC = "The People of the Black Circle"; SS = "The Slithering Shadow"; PO = "The Pool of the Black One"; RN = "Red Nails"; JG = "Jewels of Gwahlur"; BR = "Beyond the Black River"; TT = "The Treasure of Tranicos"; PS = "The Phoenix on the Sword"; SC = "The Scarlet Citadel"; CC = "Conan the Conqueror."

To indicate dates, Arabic numerals mean years; Roman numerals, centuries; Arabic numerals followed by M, millennia. The

signs + and - mean A.D. and B.C. respectively, although + is omitted for years after +1000. Hence -65 = 65 B.C.; +III = the third century of the Christian Era; -2M = the second millennium B.C.

Inventing a world is not so simple as it looks. To make it credible, it should hang together. A world in which all the wild animals were carnivores would not be credible because there would be no herbivores for them to eat.

Likewise, the technology of the people should be logical. We have some idea of what would be logical from human history, in which several civilizations have grown up more or less isolated from one another. For example, the Aztecs were on the verge of discovering the wheel when the Spaniards smashed them. So a society like the Aztecs, plus the wheel, would be plausible, but one like the Aztecs with flying machines would not be.

This is how Burroughs and Kline fell down with their stories of Mars and Venus. Burroughs's Martians have rifles shooting explosive radium projectiles, which can hit a target hundreds of miles away by radar sights—but the Martians waste time fighting with swords and spears. And, fight though they do with swords and spears, none ever wears armor—although their metallurgy is beyond ours. Maybe they deemed it unsporting. Burroughs's Venerians likewise use the *arme blanche* when they have gadgets that shoot "deadly Z-rays." Otis Kline's Venerians exhibit similar inconsistencies.

Let us see what sort of technology Howard attributed to his Hyborians. Parentheses inclose ref-

erences to the twenty stories in the original Conan series—the eighteen published during or shortly after Howard's life and the two unpublished stories found by me in 1951. It does not include the six stories discovered by Glenn Lord in 1965 because these add nothing to the technological picture. Nor does it include the pastiches, because the authors of these (Carter, Nyberg, and myself) have tried to adhere to Howard's original picture of his setting and not add new elements. The title is symbolized by the abbreviation listed in the introduction. Brackets inclose references to the approximate time and place where the invention in question first appeared in known history. Dates are shown according to the system explained in the introduction.

*Mining and Metallurgy.* The Hyborians knew six of the seven metals of classical antiquity: gold (HD), silver (SZ), copper (DI), tin (implied by the use of bronze SZ, RN), lead (PC), and iron (CC). Mercury is not mentioned\* unless it is used to back the mirrors, magical and otherwise, which are often alluded to. This, however, is a recent technique [Renaissance Europe]. Frequent mention of brass (GB, SZ, QC, etc.) suggests knowledge of zinc [+XVI] but the Hyborians may have made their brass, as classical artificers did, from calamine (zinc carbonate or silicate) without knowing zinc in its metallic form.

Ferrous metallurgy [-2M, Asia Minor] is well developed. The Hyborians have not only iron of extraordinary hardness, "forged in unholy fires among the flaming mountains of Khrosha; the metal no chisel can cut" (CC) but also "unbreakable Akbitanan steel" (JG).

\*Save in the Howard-de Camp "Hawks over Shem."

Gold and silver are used lavishly, e.g. the golden gong (JG) which I should think would, unless it were highly alloyed, give a dull clunk. Ores are extracted by mine slavery (GB) of the classical type.

*Leather Goods.* The Hyborians wore a considerable number of leathern garments, such as Conan's "short leather breeks" (HD). This suggests that their textiles were so crude and itchy that leather seemed comfortable by comparison. They also used one artifact not found in recorded history save in Great Britain, though here it was in use at least from +XI to +XIX, and possibly much earlier. This is the "blackjack" (TE), a drinking vessel of molded and tarred leather.

*Glass & Vitreous Materials.* The Hyborians had not only glass (DI) [-1M] but also clear window glass (CC) [Mediterranean, -I] and even shatter-proof glass (RH, RN) [+XX]. Vitreous materials, both natural and artificial, are highly developed, as in mirrors (RH, CC). Glass is even used for the steps of a dais (DI). Sometimes a transparent material is natural, as in the "crystal drinking vessels" (CC) and the "diamond Zamorian goblet" (GB); sometimes it is unidentified, as in the case of the "translucent sheets of some crystalline substance" (RN). The Hyborians surpassed all pre-modern historical peoples in their ability to work hard substances, or they could not have made a cup of a diamond. The art of faceting gems [medieval Europe] was known (TE).

*Textiles.* The Hyborians presumably used wool and possibly linen, though these are not specifically mentioned. (Cf. comment under *Leather Goods*.) Silk is used in the form of velvet (GB, CC),

satin (SS), and unspecified (TE, QC, RN, etc). Historically, a little wild silk was woven in the eastern Mediterranean [-IV]. But soon thereafter, importation of cultivated silk from China, where the art was centuries older, ended this industry.

*Chemistry & Chemical Products.* Beer, ale, and wine were greedily guzzled (CC, TE, etc.). Sugar (QC) was known [India, Roman imp. times]. Mummification (CC) was known [Egypt, c. -3000]. The most precocious chemical knowledge of the Hyborians was that of strong acids (RH) [Europe or Islam, +XIII].

*Cities & City Planning.* Hyborian cities were in some ways advanced beyond those of historical antiquity. For one thing, they were lighted at night (TE, SZ, SC, CC) [Antioch, +350]. For another, they enjoyed the rudiments of planning or zoning, as is shown by the references to temple districts (TE, CC) [Peiraieus, -V; some earlier Mesopotamian cities; the Indus Valley, -2M]. In the real Babylon, Memphis, Rome, etc., buildings of all kinds—public buildings, mansions, hovels, shops, temples, warehouses, whorehouses, apartment houses, taverns, bathhouses, and factories—were all jumbled together.

A curious feature of the Hyborian world is a series of cities left over from former times, sometimes built in the form of a congeries of interconnected halls, so that the city is virtually one vast house, and sometimes made of a green jade like stone. Xapur is green, although the houses seem to be separate. Xachotl has interconnected houses but is built of stones of various colors. Xuthal, the outstanding example, is interconnected and green. If you imagine the Pentagon made of jade, you have a good idea of Xuthal. Yet the Pentagon

was not built until several years after Howard's death. Could the architect of the Pentagon have been a Howard fan?

*Monuments & Architecture.* The Hyborians evidently knew the arch (TE, DI, JG) and the dome (TE, DI, BC, JG). We are not told whether these structures are the true arch and dome, with voussoirs and keystones, or corbeled arches and domes, made by laying horizontal courses of stones so that the stones of each course project beyond those of the one beneath until the courses meet at the top. Corbeled construction, if less strong and less suitable for covering large areas, is simpler and more obvious. Hence it was used in prehistoric Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Sardinia, Yucatán, etc. before the true arch appeared.

From the spaciousness of some of the domed areas in Hyborian buildings, we may infer that the Hyborians knew the true arch and dome. The true arch, elongated to form a vault, is old, going back to -3M in Mesopotamia. For over a thousand years, however, it seems to have been used only to roof over culverts and sewers, before it was applied to buildings in general. It may have been independently invented by the Etruscans, from whom the Romans took it.

The Hyborians made extravagant use of such rare and intractable materials as jet and jade for building construction (SC) and erected ceilings of marble (BD). Special structures include pyramids of the Egyptian type (CC) but better furnished with halls and passages inside, and a 150-foot cylindrical tower (TE). This last may be compared to the Pharos of Alexandria, whose height, as given by the Spanish Moor Yûsuf ibn-ash-Shaykh, was between 381 and 440 feet. As many

incidents in the stories show, Hyborian architects were lavish in providing secret passages, sliding panels, trapdoors, deadfalls, and other useful accessories of swashbuckling fiction.

*Houses & Furniture.* In no case are the plans of a house described in detail. The house of Aram Baksh (SZ) is surrounded by a wall and forms part of a compound. However, the impression is that the houses making up the compound are separate structures.

Thus we do not have the typical courtyard house prevailing in early times in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and China. Such a house has the form of a hollow square, displaying blank walls to the outer world and having doors and windows opening on the interior court. It was more easily defended and less vulnerable to thievery than a house of the modern type. It also provided more shade in a hot climate and more privacy against tax collections and other snoopers. On the other hand, the references to a courtyard (CC) suggests that Publio's house may have approached the inside-out Mediterranean plan.

Hyborian houses are furnished with good, substantial chairs, tables, and desks, which was the case with ancient Chinese houses but not with those of other parts of the world before the European Middle Ages (SS, PS, CC). The sliding door, known in pre-industrial historical times only from Japan, is also employed (BC).

Keys and locks (GB, RH, SC, CC) are of an advanced type, with tumblers in the lock [Hellenistic, possible Spartan]. Complex combination locks (CC) are known. Lighting is by candles, or by palm-oil lamps of bronze or gold (SZ). Xuthal and Xuchotl are lighted by ever-burning "radium

gems" and "green fire-stones" (SS, RN). Perfumery is provided by golden censers (SC).

*Waterworks & Sewerage.* The unnamed Corinthian city of RH lacks a complete system of public sewers (RH) but Nabonidus's house has a private sewer (RH). The situation is like that of Mesopotamian cities of -M in which there was sometimes a general storm-sewer system and, separated from this, a small waste-disposal sewer connected with temples and palaces. The two systems were kept separate because, as the system lacked the S-shaped trap, vapors arising from the waste sewer would spread through the whole storm-sewer system if the two systems were interconnected. Although nothing is said of Hyborian aqueducts, mention of fountains (PS, CC) implies their existence [Assyria, c. -700].

*Roads & Bridges.* Roads seem to be well made, as we do not hear of characters' getting stuck on them. References to them as "white" (CC) suggest that they are graded dirt roads. This in turn suggests a well-organized corvée system to keep these roads in condition. Bridge building, however, appears to be nonexistent, save for temporary floating bridges thrown across streams by armies (SC).

*Fortification & Siegecraft.* Castellated or battlemented walls (DI) are standard [Near East, c. -1000 or older]. Use of molten lead on attackers (PC) suggests machicolation [Syria, +VIII]—that is, placing the parapet out on corbels several feet in front of the wall, with trapdoors in the pavement next to the parapet through which defenders could drop things straight down on unwanted visitors. The portcullis (RH, SC) is in use [Greece, -IV].



**Arms & Armor.** Hand weapons are those employed in historical times before gunpowder: the sword, spear, axe, mace, bill, and dagger. The sword is commoner than it was in most historical cultures before the rise of Rome. With some exceptions (e.g. the Cretans and the Shardana mercenaries of Egypt, who used long bronze cut-and-thrust swords) most pre-Roman armies were armed mainly with the spear. The sword was either a small secondary weapon, as in Greece, or was reserved to officers. Hyborian swords come in all lengths, straight and curved, from two-handed swords like the Scottish claymore down to the "Zhaibar knife" (PC) and "Ghanata knife" (CC) which as described are actually broadswords of machete dimensions.

Armor includes scale mail (QC), ring mail (QC), chain mail (BC, SC), brigandine armor (CC), and steel plate armor (BC, CC). The technical distinction between ring mail and chain mail is that in the former the rings were merely sewn to a leather jacket but not interlinked, while in the latter they were interlinked to form a continuous mesh; but the scribe may not have known this fine point. The origin of the ring and chain mail is uncertain. A fragment of Etruscan chain mail exists and the Parthians may have developed it independently. The brigandine [Europe, +XIII] is a jacket or vest of heavy cloth with small iron plates riveted to the inside. The complete jointed suit of plate armor worn by Hyborian heavy cavalry appeared only in +XIV, in Europe, at the same time as the gun.

Defensive headgear includes the mail coif (BC), [Europe, +XII]; horned helmet (FD, QC); bronze crested helmet (CC), [Assyria, c. -1000]; visored helmet (CC), [Europe, +XIV]; visored salade (CC),

[Europe, +XV]; basinet (CC), [Europe, +XIV]; burganet (CC), [Europe, +XVI]; and morion (PO), [Europe +XVI].

The horned helmet was worn by some Celts of the classical era and later by Scandinavians of Viking times, although it seems never to have been so common as you might think from the movies. While the horns offered some protection to the shoulders against downright sword cuts, they must also have been easily knocked off or have caused the whole helmet to be knocked off or askew. Otherwise the Hyborians are credited with a variety of European types spread over five centuries, together with bronze crested helmets, presumably of classical type. These last quickly went out of use in -IV when Mediterranean smiths learned to make equally good helmets of iron. Alexander the Great was one of the first to wear an iron helmet.

Howard had some knowledge of the history of armor, as witness his story "Red Blades of Black Cathay" (*Oriental Stories*, Feb.-Mar., 1931). In this tale the hero, a European fighting in Central Asia against Jenghiz Khan, is described as wearing armor of the period of transition from mail to plate. Howard got his transition a century too early. And although one can find his various types of helmet in standard works on arms and armor, it would seem that Howard did not take these distinctions very seriously. Not only did he name types from +XV to +XVI, well into the gunpowder era, but he sometimes also referred to one single helmet by the names of two or three different types (e.g. CC).

*Machines and siege engines.* The crossbow (GB, CC) is well known [China, c. -500; Mediterra-

nean, -IV]. Unspecified siege engines are mentioned (WB). Specific engines include the mantlet (SC), a large shield, often loopholed, set up on the ground to protect besiegers. Missile engines included catapults, mangonels, and ballistas (SC, SM). Strictly speaking, "catapult" and "ballista" are general terms for any missile-throwing engines, meaning simply "thrower" or "hurler" [Sicily, -399]. "Mangonel" is the medieval name for the onager, the one-armed torsion catapult developed under the Roman Empire. When a scribe speaks of "mangonels and ballistas," he usually means the onager on one hand and the older type of two-armed catapult, which could shoot either darts or balls of stone or brick, on the other. The trebuchet or counterweight catapult [Europe, c. 1100] is not mentioned, nor is the manpowered Chinese *pau* from which it evolved.

Hyborian architects were familiar with sophisticated mechanisms for operating trapdoors, deadfalls, and similar booby traps (RH, JG, SS). In fact, the main employment of a Hyborian mechanician seems to have been to construct such gins. Nothing harmless, like a pipe organ, for them!

Hyborian applied science is advanced enough to make a large magnet (SZ) strong enough to hold Conan's sword against his efforts to pull it free. I doubt if any piece of natural lodestone would have so dense a magnetic flux. On the other hand, it is hard to conceive of an electromagnet in such an environment. My guess is that our hero really took a whack at one of Baal-Pteor's spectral beasts, hit a heavy wooden table instead, and sank his sword so firmly into it that he could not pull it out. The author of the *Nemedian Chronicles* added the

magnet to make a better story of it.

*Vehicles & Harness.* The camel has been domesticated (CC, BC). Historically, its use is of uncertain age in Arabia and Iran and did not spread to Egypt and North Africa until Achaemenid and Hellenistic times. The stirrup (WB, RN, CC) is known [Asia, -I to +VI]. This is not a case of REH's assumption that technics declined after the fall of Hyborian civilization and were revived in historic times, but ignorance on the part of the scribe. He also describes a Roman horseman in Britain as using stirrups ("Kings of the Night," in *Skull-Face and Others*, p. 353). In fact (though the story is not definitely dated) the Romans did not adopt stirrups until about the time of the fall of the Western Empire or even later.

Chariots are common (GB, BC, SC, CC). Oxwains (BC, CC) and wagons (BC) are referred to, but without saying whether they have two wheels or four, let alone whether the front axle is pivoted on a king bolt.

*Ships & Rigging.* Kushite and Hyrkanian pirates use galleys (QC, SM). The scribe, perhaps luckily for him, does not go into the vexed question of how the rowers were arranged. Elsewhere, ships are often casually given names like "carack" (PO) and "galleon" (TT) which, like some of the helmet types named, date from +XIV to +XVII but which do not seem to be meant very seriously. Properly speaking, "car(r)ack" and "galleon" are the words for small and large square-rigged sailing ships of this period.

A notable feature of Hyborian shipping is the merchant galley (QC, CC), a ship with more oars and less sail than a proper merchant roundship, but fewer oars and more sail than a regular war

galley. Such ships existed in the classical Mediterranean under the name of "mussel boats" (myoparônes). They were not common, having the usual shortcomings of hybrid craft, but they were sometimes used as naval auxiliaries, pirate craft, and merchantmen in pirate-infested waters. They were used for similar purposes in the Mediterranean in the late Middle Ages but disappeared in +XVI. They were popular with pilgrims going to the Holy Land for a simple reason. Whereas a sailing ship sailed directly from some European port to the Levant, a merchant galley, having but small sea-keeping capacity, crept along the coast, stopping at famous cities of antiquity; and the pilgrims, like any tourists, wanted to see all there was to be seen.

Some Hyborian rowers are free, some slave. Classical rowers, *Ben Hur* to the contrary notwithstanding, were all free; use of slaves and prisoners did not become common until +XV.

Equipment includes an anchor chain (PO), which is not surprising in view of the development of Hyborian ferrous metallurgy. Rigs include a topsail (PO), [Roman, +I], and, most startling of all, a jib or forestay sail (QC), [Netherlands, c. +1500].

*Miscellaneous Artifacts.* These include mirrors (RH), which probably go back to the Egyptian Old Kingdom, albeit in those days a mirror was a simple polished disk of silver or other metal; the barrel (TE), [Celtic, classical period]; and the candle (TE, WB, CC), [probably Etruscan]. Coinage is in use TE, BC, SZ, DI, CC), [Lydia, -VIII]. The eating fork is also used (SS), [Italy, +XI]. Although no timekeeping instruments are described, the Hyborians had instruments—

possibly water clocks—accurate enough to enable them to tell time to the nearest hour at night (RH).

The writing material mentioned most often is parchment (DI, CC). Historically, this goes back to the beginning of writing, if the term is used loosely to include any thin leather prepared for writing. The more carefully prepared kind associated with the kingdom of Pergamon, however, dates from about -200. In one place (PS) our scribe has blundered, speaking of writing with a golden stylus on waxed papyrus. He has confused two kinds of classical writing material: the waxed wooden tablet, inscribed with a stylus, and papyrus, written on with pen and ink.

Pure Science. Superscience rears its head from time to time, as with Tolkemec's electronic disintegrator (RN), the synthetic food of the Xuthalians (SS), and the luminous gems of Xuthal and Xachotl. Cosmogony is advanced enough to realize that the earth is a planet (CC) which is exactly the theory that got Galileo in trouble with the Inquisition. Optics are developed to the point of making elaborate spy tubes (RH, RN).

With magic (which I am not discussing) available, however, it is surprising that science has advanced as far as it has. On the borderline between science and magic is a superhypnotism (SZ, PC) which can enchain the victim against his will. It is unfortunate that the scribe refers to this as "mesmerism," because the name is from that of Franz Anton Mesmer (1733-1815), hardly a figure of immemorial antiquity.

Although it is perhaps a slight exaggeration to call the Hyborian world "a coherent and self-consistent-cosmos without a visible joint" (CC), Howard's world stacks up very well, in the matter

of internal consistency, with others of the genre. Technologically, Hyboria may best be compared to the historical world of the great days of the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphate, with some features of armor and rigging from later medieval times. It is certainly a more plausible world than the Martes and Veneres of Burroughs and Kline, with their naked, sword-waving, gun-toting warriors.

So, as soon as Harold Shea and I get our syllogismobile fixed, we will accept orders for trans-dimensional tickets to Hyboria. No passports needed, but be sure you have been shot for tetanus and yellow fever and that your mail is well oiled!





# THE REAL HYBORIAN AGE

by  
LIN CARTER

STORIES OF LEGENDARY and prehistoric civilizations have always intrigued me, partly because I am by nature a romantic and partly because I have always questioned the view of serious historians, current in my boyhood, that Egypt and Sumeria were the beginning of things; and before that, there were nothing but cavemen straight back to the jolly old Ice Age.

Now, logic alone will tell you that man did not turn overnight from being a nomadic hunter to raising the walls of Ur of the Chaldees. Certainly there were city-building civilizations before Egypt and Chaldea, probably dozens of them. We just haven't found them yet, that's all. Surely nothing is sillier than the notion that, one day, an Egyptian and a Sumerian were knocking back a bit of date wine and suddenly one or the other of them said, "Say, what about starting civilization, eh?"

"Civilization?" says the other one. "What's that?"

"Oh, you know! Building cities, and having kings, and great big temples, and all that. What do you say?"

"Okay by me . . ."

And—bingo—Ur of the Chaldees. Nossireebob. Nonsense, I calls it. Hence a certain partiality in my reading for Clark Ashton Smith's Hyperborea and the Atlantis of Cutcliffe-Hyne, or Henry Kuttner, for that matter, and yarns about elder Mu and lost Shamballah in the trackless sands of the Bogi. Such yarns have a fascination to them because one senses, beneath the fiction, a grain of truth. I do not suggest that history will ever find a recognizable Hyperborea or Atlantis or Mu, but surely there were cities older than Ur, and metropolises before Memphis.

The search for such is a science called prehistory. It has recently become a respectable science, because it has been finding prehistoric civilizations by the carload.

When he began writing his Conan tales, Robert E. Howard rather cleverly avoided comparison with the plethora of Atlantis stories that had been written before his time by picking for his own particular province the misty age between the destruction of Atlantis and pre-dynastic Egypt. I call this "clever" for the simple reason that no one before Howard thought of doing it.

Now, since the 1930s, when Howard created Conan, many another writer has chosen post-Atlantean times for his books. De Camp's excellent novel, *The Tritonian Ring*, for example, is laid in the declining years of Atlantis (or, as he calls it, Pûsad), and a certain work called *The Lord of the Rings* is clearly set in millennia following

the lapse of an island civilization which can only be interpreted as Atlantis. (For my reasoning in thus equating Nûmenor with Atlantis see my *Tolkien: A Look Behind The Lord of the Rings*, Ballantine, 1969, particularly Chapter 16 and especially pages 186-189.)

Howard got the idea, I suppose, from the enormous wave of imaginative speculation about early or lost civilizations which must have been current a generation before his day. The golden age of archaeology, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century, had been busy ever since, digging up places like Troy, Nineveh, Knossos, Babylon, and Ur of the Chaldees itself, thus adding whole chapters to our knowledge of the past by actually finding cities and civilizations which had previously been little more than mere names in Homer or the Bible. With each major new discovery, the mists which cloak prehistory were dispelled a bit more; and whole new civilizations—Minoan Crete, Akkadia, the Hittite Empire, and so on—had to be tacked onto world history, usually in front of what had long been there.

When Howard was a young man, speculation must have been rife concerning *what else* would soon be discovered. Writers like Burroughs were filling up the African jungles with lost Carthaginian or Atlantean cities; writers like A. Merritt were making money by the bucketfulls with novels built around archaeological mysteries such as the enigmatic stone ruins on the Pacific island of Ponape (see the opening chapters of *The Moon Pool*); and the pages of periodicals like *Argosy* were filled with things like Ralph Milne Farley's *The Golden City*, which is set in Mu. Out of this material, the stuff from which Sunday sup-

plements were made, Howard fabricated his Hyborian Age.

But that was thirty years ago, or more.

Since then, by golly, genuine honest-to-Crom lost civilizations have been uncovered: Like Mohenjo-daro, which is so new it hasn't yet quite gotten into the history textbooks. Or "Dilmun," which Geoffrey Bibby and the boys are still digging up on Kuwait. Or—very much more excitingly (with the excavations currently underway on Thera)—Atlantis itself, it would seem. And technology has given the archaeologists an incredible array of new instruments and techniques with which to work, radiocarbon dating being only the most celebrated of these. Since the time when Howard wrote, we have learned enormously more about prehistory than was known in his day.

In fact, we have discovered a genuine Hyborian Age!

Perhaps it was not quite the sort of thing the Conan stories describe so lushly—gorgeous walled cities thronged with wicked sorcerers, glorious kings and bejeweled damsels, and all that sort of thing—but some remarkable discoveries have been made.

According to the Howardian mythos, Conan lived around fifteen thousand years ago. Well, the scientific johnnies haven't quite rolled back the old mists of prehistory quite *that* far; but they have come close enough. Say, 11,000 B.C. From where we now stand, we know quite a bit about what Europe was like from 11,000 B.C. to the founding of jolly old Ur and Memphis of the White Walls—and some of it is quite surprising stuff.

The Glacial Period entered its closing phase about 11,000 B.C. Europe was cold and wintry then, and supported a tiny migratory population in northwest Europe, largely devoted to the fine art of reindeer-hunting. When I say "tiny" I am choosing my words with care; the population of early post-Glacial Europe was very small indeed. The final retreat of the glaciers from Europe has been dated to about 8,500 years B.C., and the estimated total population of Britain in those days was about 10,000 souls.

The map of Europe was considerably different, but not as different as you might suppose from a look at Sprague's map in the front of the Lancer Conan editions. Circa 8,500 B.C., the English Channel did not as yet exist. The British Isles were still mere peninsulas thrusting from the coast of northern Europe into the North Atlantic and the Thames was only a minor tributary of the mighty Rhine. Life was rather rugged in those days, not counting all those reindeer-hunts. Only one animal had been domesticated by the eighth millennium B.C.—man's first and oldest friend, the dog.

Travelling east, things were a bit livelier.

In the Near East we have communities in Palestine using flint knives to reap wild, or perhaps cultivated, cereals, at a radiocarbon date of about 8,850 B.C. These people, the Natufian culture, had a diet based mostly on the fruits of gazelle-hunting; and they lived in queer, oval houses up to twenty-five feet in diameter which were partly sunken in the ground and had walls of red polished plaster. Rather like enormous beehives, I guess. The nearest thing to a city yet known was a ten-acre settlement at Nahal Oren, dated somewhat earlier than 7,000 B.C. It was a respectable

metropolis for the period, and had a town wall around it with watchtowers up to thirty feet high. This was before the Bronze or even the Copper Age. We are really talking about the twilight of the Stone Age here.

Various evidence drawn from a number of sites in Anatolia, the Levant, and Turkmenia suggests that permanent mud-brick towns based on farming, ruled by elective mayors, with town councils of elders and a free voting citizenry, existed as early as 5,000 B.C. This seems quite surprising—democratic farm towns?—no blood-soaked Oriental despots?—but such seems to be the case. The familiar despotic and hereditary tyrants were, oddly enough, rather late-comers on the social scene.

Moving a bit closer to historical times, there are now known to have existed a truly vast series of crude agricultural centers—but genuine towns for all that—which stretched across the Balkans from Czechoslovakia and Poland up the Rhine to Brussels and even into the Netherlands. The date? 4,500 B.C. Europe was still one titantic forest then. Even the lowlands of Holland were heavily forested. This culture is called the Danubian.

To give you an example of what city life was like among the Danubians, one giant settlement of the fifth millennium has been excavated at Sittard in the Netherlands and has been investigated rather thoroughly. It consisted mostly of timber-built houses and sheds, but there were at least forty such structures, and some of them had four or five rooms. Sittard is still being excavated, but thus far evidence reveals the size of this Rotterdam of the Stone Age as being some seven hundred feet long. Some of the individual buildings, the larger ones,

are as much as seventy or even eighty feet on a side. These are all wooden structures, of course. It was somewhat later that the mysterious Megalith people began raising their stone structures upon the misty forelands of primal Europe.

These stone buildings are also under careful scrutiny these days. Some of the monumental, collective, stone-chambered tombs in France have been dated by the carbon 14 method to dates prior to 3,000 B.C. The megalithic "tombs" are still quite mysterious. Some of them seem to have been in more or less constant use for a good thousand years before the last stiff was planted therein and the place sealed up. Nobody knows, but we just might be dealing with ancient dynastic necropoli-buildings.

The stone multiple tombs are not only imposing because of sheer size, but also because of sheer number. Five thousand of them have so far been unearthed in France alone, three thousand five hundred on the Danish islands, and something like two thousand have been found in Britain. They are scattered from the western shores of the Mediterranean all the way to the Shetlands and even southern Scandinavia. If they are not all the work of a single culture—which would be quite fantastic: really! a Stone Age continental empire?—they are at least darn similar in design, structural techniques, and apparent purpose.

While Europeans of the "late Hyborian Age" were still building either wooden agricultural towns or megalithic stone tombs, the Copper Age had begun somewhat to the east. It is now believed that copper was worked as early as 5,000 B.C., at least in Persia. In Anatolia, it may have been worked as early as 6,000 B.C.

And now, hold on, gang, here comes a real lost civilization of the dawn age worthy almost of Robert Howard.

I refer to an archaeological site called Catal Hüyük. It was definitely the most fabulous metropolis of the Stone Age and biggest city on earth. Catal Hüyük is in Anatolia, which, as the most advanced country in the world for its remote era, should have been called Aquilonia.

Around 6,000 B.C., and maybe even earlier, a truly fantastic city of enormous size was flourishing at Catal Hüyük. It has been believed for some years that the first town-level at Jericho was, if not the oldest of earth's cities, at least the biggest of the early ones. Jericho now has been deposed. The Catal Hüyük metropolis was vastly larger. At about the same time that Jericho covered ten acres, Catal Hüyük was *thirty-two* acres in extent. This suggests to the authorities a command over environment and a capacity for social organization easily comparable to the level of sophistication achieved by Early Dynastic Sumer *three thousand years later*. Not only was it the largest of earth's first cities, but the most advanced as well. Elsewhere in Anatolia, the Copper Age got started about 6,000 B.C., as noted earlier in this article; copper-working got started here at Catal Hüyük at least a thousand years before that.

Now, the Copper Age is one of the world's great historical mysteries. It seems to have been a very brief interlude between the New Stone Age and the Bronze Age, both which are, by comparison, very much better known. The invention of bronze-working came very late in history. This was not because of any technological difficulty involved, but simply because while copper itself



is not a very common metal in Europe, tin—which is required to make the alloy we call bronze—is downright rare. (Could the famous tin mines of Cornwall have possibly been worked this early? Crom only knows, but it's an exciting thought.) At any rate, the dawn of the rather brief Copper Age led to the world's first real industry. At least two rather precocious copper-mining towns have thus far been discovered. The first of these prehistoric Anacondas was in eastern Europe, centered on the great ore deposits of Transylvania; the other was in Spain. Mining towns of later date and smaller size, devoted to extracting copper ore, have also been found in southern Russia and in the Caucasus. They date from the second half of the third millennium B.C. . . . But by this point we are in the days of the rise of Akkad under Sargon (about 2,370 B.C.) and well into the beginnings of regular history.

Speaking of Akkad—which is still a Lost City as far as the archaeologists go, which is to say they haven't found it yet—reminds me we have a new date recently established for the Indo-European migration. Some new evidence has come to light in, of all places, the Hittite records, which suggests that the vanguard of the great Indo-European horde was already on the horizon in Sargon's day, or thereabout. Records preserved at Kanesh in the land of the Hatti indicate the presence of Indo-Europeans on the Anatolian plateau around 2,000 B.C. The people vaguely defined as Indo-Europeans, you know, are the ancestors of most of us—the Nordic or Aryan or Caucasian group.

The mysterious homeland of the Indo-Europeans has eluded us for a long time. Early

theories suggested that the migration started very far away indeed, say the middle of the Gobi, about where A. Merritt located his legendary Uighur empire in the first part of *Dwellers in the Mirage*, or central India at the very least. But now the long-lost racial motherland is beginning to come to light, and it seems to have been closer to home than was originally believed. Despite a certain body of evidence which leads a minority of scholars to favor the north European plans, the majority opinion these days tends to an area west of the Urals and north of the Black Sea, midway between the Carpathians and the Caucasus. That would be in the same steppes beyond Zamora, in Hyborian Age terminology, in an area where Howard—rather prudently—failed to place a country.

Those who are interested in learning about recent discoveries regarding the “real” Hyborian Age will find a number of good books available, such as J.G.D. Clark’s *World Prehistory: An Outline* (1961) or the same author’s *The Mesolithic Settlement of Europe* (1936, and somewhat dated, but meaty). V. Gordon Childe’s *The Prehistory of European Society* (1958) may also be recommended, and I could also suggest Childe’s very excellent *The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins* (1926); but, alas, it too is dated and much in need of a modern revision. For the best and most recent all-around book on the subject, I direct your attention to Stuart Piggott’s *Ancient Europe* (1968).

**LORD  
OF THE  
BLACK THRONE**  
by  
**P. SCHUYLER MILLER**

EVEN THE MOST recondite students of the Hyborian Age have not yet been able to find the shards and glyphs of its shining kingdoms in the dust and mud of our own past. True, some of the resounding names of Conan's time have echoed thinly down into our own—Sprague de Camp traced most of them to their present incarnation—but to most, I think, there has slowly come the conviction that some fantastic stroke of Archeronian sorcery, some web of evil spun in the Black Kingdoms of the South or by undying shamans in the cold wastes beyond Khitai, must have torn the warp of Time and sent our world down its present uncertain track.

When—in that world and ours—the cataclysm occurred, some more diligent student than I must discover. We remember Atlantis, as did the sages of the Hyborian Age—but there are no crumbled walls or wave-torn battlements to show where Atlantis was. It sank in Conan's world, and not in

ours. If Time is as strange as it sometimes seems, Conan may still ride and rule beyond the knitted curtain that has fallen between us. Only a little of his age of heroes has survived to haunt us.

And yet, in our own world and long ago, there have been times when shining kingdoms grew and bickered and met in the market places. There have been times—and a time—when swift ships plowed the seas in search of far ports—and found them, and returned. There was one time in particular when laden mules plodded behind their masters across the mountain passes that separated the cities of the Midland Sea from the black forest of the North . . . when caravans carried silks and gems and strangely wrought golden jewels across the high deserts . . . when priests of a fearsome cult carried their curses and their ancient magic to the far parts of the world.

Conan lived, his chronicler tells us, some twelve thousand of our years ago. The age of which I speak came long after Conan, at least by our reckoning. It was, indeed, the very age of which the Nemedian chronicler writes, when the Sons of Aryas rose in their shining thousands on the ancient steppes of the Heartland, and rode with lance and sword and bow to seize dominion over the ancient kingdoms of Meluhha and Lulubi and Zalmaqum and Kussara, and to challenge the rule of Hammurabi of Babylon and the many princes of Canaan and even the lords of Egypt.

I commend to you a book by the British archaeologist (now director of a Danish museum), Geoffrey Bibby. Its name; *Four Thousand Years Ago*. Alfred A. Knopf published it several years ago; price, \$6.95, if you're in a spending mood. Otherwise, steal it.

Geoffrey Bibby has picked up the mantle of the late V. Gordon Childe, and wears it with a good deal more style and swash. Like Childe, he sees beyond the shapes of pots and battle axes, the sightless eyes of ruined gods, and the ghost of a ship in the sand, to the people who made and used them. He has his own mirror of Tuzun Thune, and he is not afraid to report what he sees in it. He hears the drum of hoofs as the first horses charge down out of the steppes beyond the Caspian . . . the clash of bronze sword against shield . . . the screams of women and children going into slavery, and of old men cut down because they are too old to feed on the slave track. He smells blood, and incense, and the sea spume, and the tang of the pine forests of northern Europe, where the road of the bronze smiths led to the pits of the amber diggers.

In this book, Bibby gives us a running chronicle of the thousand years between 2,000 and 1,000 B.C. He writes almost with the sweep of "The Hyborian Age"—and what he writes happened, or may have happened. He carries the story through, a generation at a time, showing us what a man of a particular century would know about his world, what he would remember of his past, and what he would have heard in the tales of old people. From time to time he looks into his mirror, or a sage's bowl of ink, and shows us the entire world.

A busy, bloody, wonderful world it was, too. The bits and scraps of ancient history that most of us have studied left an impression of isolation—parochialism. Egypt marked the floodings of the Nile and built pyramids. Babylon was notorious in another land of rivers. The Children of Israel squabbled and prophesied and played politics

with their neighbors—whoever they may have been. Europe was a howling wilderness; China was a place of exotic silks and rice; India was presumably contemplating its navel. Then came Greece; then came Rome; then came exam time. Bibby shows us that in this Second Millenium B.C. the peoples of the world were very much aware of each other. Traders from the cities of Sumer went to the twin kingdoms of the Indus. Egyptian expeditions probed deep into Nubia and south past Punt and the Eastern Horn of Africa. Merchant venturers from Crete roved the western Mediterranean, and passed out through the gateway of Gibraltar to investigate the shores and islands of the Atlantic.

“If ever there was a period in the millennia before our own era when America might have been reached from Europe or Africa, that period was in the centuries between 1650 and 1300 B.C.,” Bibby says. (We know Conan was there, six thousand years of Hyborian time before.)

A few carpers have objected to the picture of ancient, worldwide cults of dark gods, with which Conan was ever in conflict. In the traditional picture, each kingdom had its own tight pantheon, and the gods of Eridu were not the gods of Ugarit or Knossos. But this millennium of which Bibby writes was the age when the death cult of the megalith-raisers spilled out of the Mediterranean gate and made its way up the Atlantic coasts to England and beyond. This was the millennium when the horse-breeding Indo-Europeans came down out of High Asia with their own gods—the same from India to Greece and beyond—to establish dominion over a welter of native kingdoms, and set up the temples of Mithra

and Indra beside the altars of the ancient gods of the land. This—although the author says less than he could about it—was the era when priests must have accompanied the traders who worked their way down the coast of Middle America, from Mexico to Ecuador and Peru, and when others may have carried the word and the gifts of the new gods—the gifts of the Three Sisters, maize and beans and squash—to the receptive peoples of the southern United States and the Mississippi valley, even, in time, as far as Ohio and perhaps Wisconsin.

It was a millennium that began with Abraham, a merchant prince in the Amorite ghetto at Ur, and ended with Saul in battle against the Philistines. It was the millennium when agriculture spread up the Danube to the coasts of the Baltic and the North Sea, and to the fringes of the Congo jungle. It was the millennium when bronze replaced stone in much of the world, and when iron finally began to replace bronze. It was the time when chariots carried conquering armies farther and faster than spearmen could march . . . the time of Hammurabi, and Akhnaten, and Nefertiti, of Minos, and Agamemnon, and the siege of Troy, of the great Shang emperors of An-yang, and the collapse of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa (whose real names we may never know, unless Bibby finds them among the records of the merchant princes of Dilmun, on the island of Bahrein, halfway between Sumer and the Indus).

Archaeologists, whenever they get together, complain that historians pay no attention to the shelf after shelf of excavation reports and ceramic studies that they are adding daily to the corpus of human knowledge—what Bibby, in a previous

book, called "the testimony of the spade." Historians complain that all this stuff is so circumstantial and subjective; give them a nice letter from Tutankhamun's widow to the Hittite emperor, asking for a husband of royal blood who will enable her to stave off a degrading compromise, and translate it for them, and they'll mention it in a footnote. The linguists have ideas about what their reconstructed proto-languages prove about the birthplace of the Sumerians or the Indo-Europeans. The mythologists diligently compare variant versions of the adventures of the Gilgamesh—that heroic figure out of the most ancient Sumerian tales who has certain resemblances to Conan.

All these bits and pieces enrich our picture of the past. Men like Geoffrey Bibby are the artists who rebuilt them into a mosaic in which, if you watch closely, you will see the lines of chariots pounding across the desert, and the sunlight on lance heads of burnished bronze, and the raw color of a king's banner brought across the world from the court of the yellow lords.

It was an age when Conan could have lived again.



**ROBERT E.  
HOWARD'S FICTION**



**THE ART  
OF ROBERT  
ERVIN HOWARD**  
by  
**POUL ANDERSON**

WHEN A SUBJECT has been discussed by intelligent men for any length of time, it becomes virtually impossible to say something new about it. This is even more true of literature than of politics, philosophy, or the other arts. Science, including the highly developed science of textual criticism, is exempt, because the dialogue is less between man and man than it is between man and a quasi-infinite universe. Thus there can be no more original praises of the immortal Sherlock, but his Canon remains an inexhaustible field for scholarly research. Friends of Conan should therefore, I think, devote more effort to close examination of the chronicles than to simple adulation of the hero. But being caught short on time and materials, I must now deny my own precept and go on one of those rambles known as a familiar essay—over ground long ago covered by such people as John D. Clark and P. Schuyler Miller.

It might first be asked if I am entitled to call myself a friend of Conan. I did treat him rather

roughly in a little burlesque called "The Barbarian." But I submit, *imprimis*, that friends may be forgiven a bit of horseplay; *secundus*, that Conan is far too powerful to be hurt by such blows of the quill; *tertius*, that to the extent that I have been at odds with him, I only supply that often overlooked necessity of the hero, a villain.

You will recall that the great Demon lords in *The Worm Ouroboros* came to recognize this need, and to turn time itself back so that their enemies of Witchland might again contest their existence. It is heresy, but I have always felt this to be a flaw in an otherwise magnificent book. Hotheaded youth may deliberately seek risk and hardship; men responsible for broad lands have neither the right nor, if they are sane, the wish to do the wild deeds for the deeds' own sake. I can far more readily believe in Odysseus, who wrought so mightily to get back to some home cooking. Tennyson's reconstruction of the aftermath is pure sentimentalism. The Fellowship of the Ring were likewise forced to high emprise, and wished throughout for nothing more than peace and security for whose restoration they strove with Sauron himself. Gunnar of Lithend and Grettir the Strong were driven to the wall by malicious circumstance: only then did they show what manhood can be when it must.

Here, then, is a point at which Conan rings true. He grows. He starts as a larcenous young soldier of fortune; he learns, almost by accident, what it is to lead men and how much duty is implied by the concept "chief"; finally, as King of Aquilonia, he puts down the banditry by which he once made his own living, fights less for himself than for his country, and even settles down with a lawful wife.

Naturally, he still gets restless—we all do—but I think that if the powers of darkness had only left him alone, his sword would not again have troubled the earth. He would have gotten nostalgic about the old days; he would never have developed into a Grand Old Man, but rather would have shocked his decorous offspring with oaths and ale hoisting; but he would have been wise enough to compromise with reality.

However, let us admit that Conan does not have the human stature of the greatest adventurers. He lacks complexity. I do not mean that a hero should be neurotic. On the contrary, the protagonist of the typical modern novel is a sniveling little wretch, a hundred of whom would not make one Conan, even with respect to the interesting virtues. But Conan is always too single-minded, shall we say. Compare the tenth-century Icelander Egil Skallagrimsson: a rover and warrior from Greenland to Russia, confidant of one king and mortal foe of another—but also a poet of the first rank, a shrewd trader, a still more shrewd observer, a man of sardonic humor (often directed at himself) as well as undying hatreds; finally, aged and blind, he kills a man for some half-senile reason, but about this same time, when his son is drowned, he composes the unforgettable *Sonatorrek*. To be sure, Egil is a historical figure, but whoever wrote his saga (the best guess is Snorri Sturlason) was one of the finest biographical novelists of all time.

Conan is much less of an individual. His characteristics are few and obvious. Fearless in battle, though prone to superstitious terrors, he is a moody soul, his mirth rare and crude. He is unflinchingly loyal to friends, unrelentingly fierce to

enemies. He picks up some knowledge of tactics, but seems innocent of all strategic concepts, and is handicapped (I should think) by such peculiar prejudices as his belief that the bow is an unmanly weapon. Until rather late in life, he looks on woman immaturely, as mere toys, and shows no particular interest in starting a family. This is atypical of people in general and barbarians in particular, possibly Conan's rather traumatic childhood caused it. However, it should certainly have occurred to him earlier than it did, that the King of Aquilonia had an obligation to beget a legitimate heir. Conan possesses a rough chivalry, and is not at all sadistic; but neither does he ever seem to think that the men he cuts down in such wholesale lots are human, too. This, with much else, betrays his limited intelligence. I suspect Aquilonia was well governed under him simply because, like Genghis Khan, he had wit enough to pick good bureaucrats.

But when we have thus delimited Conan, what remains is still good. He is brave, honest in his own fashion, steadfast, vaguely conscious of *noblesse oblige*. Once his juvenile-delinquent phase has been outgrown, he does his dogged best. You can like him, even if you wouldn't invite him to dinner.

And, of course, the things that happen to him! In this, I think, the art of Robert E. Howard was hard to surpass: vigor, speed, vividness. He had not the command granted an Eddison or a Tolkien, but nonetheless he fulfilled the storyteller's prime obligation, to make scenes and events come real. Howard was a highly visual writer; I imagine what he treated of stood clearly before him as he

wrote. And not all that he saw was dark, evil, or violent. There are scattered passages of considerable beauty—for example, in *Conan the Conqueror*, a description of the southern Aquilonian landscape, seen from a hilltop near sunset. And always there is that furious, galloping narrative pace. If Conan is not the greatest of warriors, neither is he the least.





**MEMORIES**  
of  
**R. E. H.**  
by  
**L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP**

CROSS PLAINS, WHERE Robert E. Howard lived, lies about 43 miles southeast of Abilene, Texas, and an approximately equal distance north-northwest of Brownwood, where Howard studied for two years. This cluster of towns comes close to marking the exact center of Texas.

The land is flat, with a very slight roll. In aboriginal days it was not a semidesert of "poor steppe" like that of New Mexico, nor yet a true desert, like much of Arizona. It was a well-wooded country, covered by an open stand of a small oak, seldom over 20 feet high, called the post oak or jack oak. Between the oaks grew a sparse cover of grass and herbs. The flora would be classed as a scrub forest of the Mediterranean type.

Now, of course, many of the oaks have been cleared away for pasture land and wheat fields, although enough still stand to give an idea of the former appearance of the country. When I was there, at the beginning of April, the wheat fields bore the bright yellowish-green, lawnlike carpet of young wheat. The oaks were barely beginning to come into leaf.

Dr. Alan Nourse and I, who had spent three weeks climbing Aztec and Mayan pyramids in Mexico, drove into Brownwood the evening of 31 March 1965. It was in Brownwood that Howard finished his formal education. The public schools in Cross Plains went only as far as the tenth grade; therefore Howard went to Brownwood for two years at Brownwood High School (1922-23) and at Howard Payne Academy, a preparatory school run in connection with the college (1926-27). He graduated from the Academy in 1927 and took a few commercial courses at the college but received no college credits.

Early next morning, in overcast, drizzly weather, we drove out to the cemetery on the outskirts of town. A noisy cement factory adjacent to the cemetery does not lend a romantic atmosphere. The custodian showed us to the Howard plot, where a single large, plain stone, shaped somewhat like the head of a double bed, marks the place of burial. Across the upper edge runs the word HOWARD. Below it, three panels read, from left to right:

ROBERT E.  
AUTHOR AND POET  
1906-1936

HESTER ERVIN\*  
WIFE AND MOTHER  
1870-1936

ISAAC M.  
PHYSICIAN  
1871-1944

A long, narrow panel below these reads: "They

\*Spelled "Ervine" in the birth and death certificates of Robert E. Howard and his mother but "Ervin" in all other family records.

were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided." (2 Samuel i, 23.) Robert Howard and his mother each has a footstone as well; but, when old Doctor Howard died, there was nobody left to add one for him.

I was tempted to indulge in a picturesque gesture, like drinking a toast to Howard and pouring a little of the whiskey on his grave. However, the presence of Alan, no admirer of Howard's writing and not the least sentimental about his remains, froze any such romantic impulses.

We drove back through Brownwood and headed for Cross Plains under somber skies. We crawled over a flat, limitless landscape dotted with thousands of scrubby, leafless post oaks. Here and there a few cattle grazed a field.

In midmorning we reached Cross Plains, in the midst of this vastness. To the west, the level horizon was broken by a conical hill, the larger of the two Caddo Peaks, named for the Caddo Indians. No great mountain, this hill is nevertheless conspicuous in its isolation.

Cross Plains today harbors about 1,200 people—300 fewer than when Howard lived. While Brownwood has grown from 14,000 to 20,000 since Howard's day, people say that time seems to have passed Cross Plains by. Except for some new service stations on the outskirts, with the usual big, blatant signs, the town has changed little in recent decades.

On the other hand, Cross Plains is a rather pleasant-looking little town. From my reading I had been led to expect some hideous huddle of tarpaper shacks. Instead, I found neat modern bungalows, surrounded by the lawns and plantings of the typical suburban, twentieth-century

American home. Most of the houses are one-story, but there are a couple of business buildings of several stories on the main street.

In Brownwood and Cross Plains I looked up several boyhood friends of Howard—or tried to. One man went shy on me and made excuses for not being interviewed; another proved voluble and articulate on the subject of Howard but manifested horror at the thought of being quoted in print. So, unfortunately, I cannot name names or present the interviews as they happened.

Howard, my informants told me, was just under six feet tall in his maturity. In youth he was slender to the point of skinniness, but he filled out in his twenties until he weighed over 200 pounds, most of it muscle. He was a sport and exercise fanatic, being a devotee of the Golden Gloves and himself an accomplished boxer.

One informant said:

“Bob had a funny habit. He’d be walking along the street, and you’d see him suddenly start to shadowbox. He’d box for a few seconds and then go back to walking again.”

As a boy, Howard’s moody, introverted personality and precocious intellectuality made him something of a misfit. Said one man: “He was not bullied, neither did he bully others.”\*

Howard was a person of emotional extremes and of violent likes and dislikes. One reason his parents sent him to Brownwood to school, for instance, was to help him to get over the excessive grief that consumed him when his dog died. Besides the dog, he also owned a horse and rode well.

\*According to Howard’s letters, this was entirely true. In boyhood he did go through a bullied period, but this stopped when, through exercise and training, he became strong enough to take care of himself.

At Brownwood, Howard was given to walking in his sleep. In fact, he once walked out the window. Although not seriously hurt, he thereafter tied one toe to the foot of his bed to keep that from happening again.

At this time—in his late teens and early twenties—Howard had developed no visible interest in women. When he felt like it, he was a great conversationalist, holding forth at length on any subject on earth. He was known to get drunk, but only rarely, and never got into fights. For one thing, other men had better sense than to cross anybody with Howard's physique. The drunken brawls and wenching that Howard's letters hint at were, my informants agreed, imaginary.

In his late twenties, before his death, Howard earned the most money of any man in Cross Plains—even more than the local banker! Of course this was in the depths of the Great Depression, when bankers were harried and \$2,500 a year was a nice, plump income. Howard's circumstances were never exactly easy, since word rates at the time were low (mostly half a cent or a cent a word), payment was often late, and Howard's mother's illnesses caused him heavy expenses. But whatever his maladjustments, money troubles do not seem to have been among them.

Howard was hot-tempered, flaring up easily but cooling off just as quickly. Once the *Cross Plains Review* published a story that did not give Howard's mother the credit he thought she should have had. Howard marched into the newspaper office, threw a copy down on the editor's desk, and told him not to send the damned paper to his house anymore. The next day, Doctor Howard came to the office and revived the subscription.

Even Howard's friends found him something of an enigma. As one of them put it: "He just didn't give a damn for a lot of things that other people do."

In all the speculation about Howard's relations with his mother, not much attention has been paid to his father. Isaac Howard seems to have been an extremely bossy, self-assertive, overbearing man—an unattractive domestic tyrant. Moreover, he was wrapped up in his medical practice to the virtual exclusion of his family. He and his son quarreled furiously and frequently, often because Robert took his father to task for neglecting his mother. Although they quickly made up these quarrels, there seems to have been little love lost between them.

It is well known that Howard's interest in women developed late. Until a year before his death he dated Novalyne Price, a teacher of public speaking in the local high school. She was considered a little eccentric, too, a perfectionist with her pupils. The University of Texas stages an annual University Interscholastic League contest in public speaking. This usually takes the form of a series of one-act plays put on by teams from various schools about the state. Miss Price coached her team so mercilessly—usually on a cut-down version of one of Shakespeare's plays—that she repeatedly won first prize.

The day of Howard's suicide was an exceptionally hot one. Early the morning of 11 June 1936, he was told by the nurse attending his mother that she would never regain consciousness. He sat down at his battered Underwood No. 5 typewriter and typed out the couplet:

All fled—all done, so lift me on the pyre;  
The feast is over and the lamps expire.

Then he went out, got in his car, and about 8:00 A.M. shot himself in the head with the pistol he had for some time carried against imaginary "enemies." He died about four that afternoon, while his mother lingered until the following day.

The second line of the farewell couplet seems to be a paraphrase of a line in the fourth and last stanza of the well-known poem, "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae," by Ernest Christopher Dowson (1867-1900). The stanza reads:

I cried for madder music, and for stronger  
wine,  
But when the feast is over and the lamps  
expire,  
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! The night is  
thine;  
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,  
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my  
fashion.

Dowson, a minor Victorian poet who died young of tuberculosis and alcoholism, also wrote a number of poems full of the studied melancholy and self-conscious thanatophilia that sometimes occurs in Howard's verse.

After the deaths of Howard and his mother, an incident occurred that sheds further light on Doctor Howard. The old man went to the editor of the *Review* and barked:

"I'm going to start a Sunday school class.

Round up all the men in town for Sunday night." The editor did, since the doctor was not the kind of man to be denied. At the meeting, Doctor Howard stood up and began:

"Now, I want every man of you, who's ever been drunk or been in a whorehouse, to stand up."

As my informant put it: "Well, I stood up, and some of the others stood up; but it sure was embarrassing."

My informants agreed that, notwithstanding that Howard had talked of suicide for years, the main factor in his self-destruction was his excessive devotion to his mother. Discussing the matter with me afterwards, Alan Nourse, as a physician, pointed out that Howard's history provided a classic case of sexual maladjustment, such as is often initiated by the combination of a domineering, coldly hostile father and an overprotective mother.

"That sleepwalking alone," he said, "indicates a profoundly neurotic personality—probably hysteric and hypersuggestible. You add to these other factors the fact that he was only starting to take an interest in women when he was nearly thirty, and that exaggerated interest in manly sports—well, it's obvious that here was a fellow who wasn't wired up just right in the matter of sex." He also noted that the profession of writing has one of the highest suicide rates.

Whatever be the true explanation of Howard's tragedy, I am no psychoanalyst, let alone a posthumous one. I present these recollections and surmises for whatever they may be worth. But then, if Howard had been perfectly normal and well-adjusted, he probably would have become a cowboy, and we should never have had Conan.



**CONAN  
ON CRUSADE**  
by  
**ALLAN HOWARD**

IT WOULD SEEM that among the least known of the works of Robert E. Howard are those that appeared in that short-lived publication *Oriental Stories/Magic Carpet*. There is probably a twofold reason for this. The first issue of *Oriental Stories*, a sister magazine of the late, and greatly lamented, *Weird Tales*, in the heyday was dated October-November 1930. This meant that the new venture was launched just as the Great Depression was well underway. It sold for twenty-five cents, and this, in those days, was no mean sum to pony up all at once for the fuzzy-faced youths who made up the bulk of what was later to be called "Fandom." Furthermore, this Fandom was passionately devoted to science fiction as such, and while, for good and sufficient reasons, they grudgingly included *Weird Tales* in the fold, they at this time had scant interest in Oriental adventure stories. Consequently, few copies of this extremely interesting publication seem to have been saved and cherished.

In the main, the first issue contained stories by established *Weird Tales* favorites including Frank Owen, Otis Adelbert Kline, Paul Ernst, and G. G. Pendarves, as well as Robert E. Howard with "The Voice of El-Lil." Howard had eight stories in all in the magazine during its fourteen-issue life, and soon became its most popular contributor. Reports are available for seven of the eight issues in which he appeared, and his stories took first place in readers' preference in five, and tied for first in the other two. This was against some pretty stiff competition from the pens of such as H. Bedford-Jones, Seabury Quinn, Edmond Hamilton, and E. Hoffmann Price.

Not by any means one of Howard's better efforts, "The Voice of El-Lil" is yet an interest-holding modern adventure story in the classic "Lost Race" tradition. Two adventurers stumble upon a forgotten backwater of Sumerian culture in the Somali hinterland. Captured by warriors of a long-dead civilization, and about to be sacrificed to the local deity by exposure to the brain-shattering reverberations of a monstrous gong (the Voice of El-Lil), they are saved by a temple dancer who had fallen in love with one of them. A short but typically bloody fight, in the Howard fashion, follows, and the girl dies of wounds suffered in the brawl. Readers accustomed to a touch of the supernatural in a Howard story have to be content with a hint that the "Voice of El-Lil" was fashioned by dark wizards in some possibly prehuman time. As the temple girl is dying she speaks confidently of many incarnations, past and future, of the too-soon-parted lovers.

With the February-March 1931 number, and the lead story "Red Blades of Black Cathay," Howard

settled on the great clashes of Western and Eastern armies in the Middle Ages for the locales and times of his stories for the rest of the life of the magazine. Written in collaboration with Tevis Clyde Smith, "Red Blades of Black Cathay" is the story of Godric de Villehard, Norman Crusader, who sets out to find the fabled kingdom of Prester John and finds instead a kingdom of his own, and a princess in Black Cathay. Along the way Godric battles the hordes of the mighty Genghis Khan himself to a standstill, and gives up only when the Khan agrees to full autonomy for Godric's new kingdom. If this apparent picture of easy compliance on the part of the well-known pyramid builder, who used the skulls of those who opposed him as building blocks, seems at variance with the accepted reality, well, Howard never pretended to write history. Enough sword-swinging and red carnage abound in "Red Blades of Black Cathay" to satisfy even the most sanguinary Howard fan.

"Hawks of Outremer" in the Spring 1931 issue featured Cormac FitzGeoffrey, embittered Irish Crusader and adventurer, a sort of latter-day Conan, who may well have been a direct descendant of the Cimmerian. He is described as a turbulent character and a savage fighter, six feet one inch tall, and two hundred pounds of iron muscle. He had a dark, grim face; black, square-cut hair; and blazing blue eyes. At the age of twelve he was running wild on the naked fens, wore wolfskins, weighed fourteen stone, and had killed three men. Sound familiar?

Cormac battles his way through a maze of treachery, both oriental and the scarcely less subtle variety of some of his fellow Crusaders. His

simple and favorite solution for a knotty problem, like Conan and Alexander of Macedon, is the slash of a sword. Eventually, Cormac encounters fairness and kindness from a most unexpected source, the hands of the great Sultan Saleh-ed-din, and like a wolf at bay, doesn't quite know what to make of it. He does in turn accord to the Moslem a grudging admiration that few other men had ever had from him.

FitzGeoffrey returns in the Autumn issue, in "The Blood of Belshazzar," a tale of a bandit stronghold in the Taurus Mountains, and an immense ruby, for the exclusive possession of which, dark covetousness, murderously aroused, leads to an almost one-hundred-percent mortality among the cast. Howard was always fond of inserting a large jewel into his stories. With a little reworking, some name changing, and the addition of a demon or two, as well as of a damsel in need of succor, this story could be mortared neatly into the Saga of Conan.

Cahal O'Donnel, pretender to the throne of Ireland, is the name of Howard's Crusader hero in "The Sowers of the Thunder" in the Winter 1932 *Oriental Stories*. Exiled, and with a price on his head, Cahal rides into Jerusalem in the year 1243. He joins a party of ex-Crusaders turned bandit, on a foray to sack a Moslem treasure stronghold. They are cut to pieces by a Kharesmian horde fleeing the much greater horde of Mongols on the march. Cahal alone escapes to warn Jerusalem. At odd times the Irishman's path crosses that of a couple of strange characters, one Baibars, known as the Panther, general of the Egyptian Mamelukes, and a mysterious Masked Knight, under vow of silence. At the end, when the combined

Mameluke and Kharesmian armies crush a hasty coalition of Christians and Moslems defending the Holy City, Cahal discovers that the Masked Knight is his now-penitent former love who had betrayed him to his enemies back in Ireland. She dies in battle, and Cahal and Baibars meet for the last time in an unusual passage at arms. There is also a passing mention in the story of an exploit of Cormac FitzGeoffrey, which, unfortunately, was probably never chronicled.

In the same issue is a letter by an enthusiastic Howard fan. It reads: "Wow! What a story that 'The Blood of Belshazzar' by Robert E. Howard in the Autumn issue of *Oriental Stories*. If I am any judge of good fiction, that is one of the best stories printed this year in any magazine. It is what we readers want. Let us have more of Howard's stuff."

This letter was written by Jack Scott, editor of *The Cross Plains Review*, Texas. This no doubt spontaneous tribute by a complete stranger is surely a fine example of the kind often elicited by the sheer power of Howard's writing. Kidding aside, this praise was not unjustified. "Blood of Belshazzar" is still a good story.

Howard is back again in the Summer 1932 issue with "Lord of Samarcand." This time he writes of the great Mongol conqueror Tamerlane and of his defeat of the Turkish sultan Bayazid, in the year 1402. If we can believe Howard, the course of history was altered in several ways by the great passion for revenge of his Highlander protagonist, Donald MacDeesa. His was the blow that struck down Douglas at the Battle of Otterburn. Acting as the agent of Tamerlane he brought about the downfall of Bayazid in payment for the Christian defeat at Nicopolis, and in a fury at learning that

Tamerlane had executed Donald's talebearing mistress, he capped it all by shooting the Khan to death.

A Howard story did not appear again until the July 1933 number. In the meantime *Oriental Stories* had become *Magic Carpet*, with a new policy of printing action adventure from any locale or time, including the far future.

In "The Lion of Tiberias," John Norwald, British Dane and landless wanderer, is captured and sentenced to the galleys by Zenghi, Moslem conqueror and forerunner of the better known Saleh-ed-din. Years later Norwald escapes and makes his way to Zenghi's tent before the walls of a besieged city, and with muscles hyperdeveloped from his oar-pulling stint, strangles the Lord of Mosul most satisfyingly. This simple plot brackets an entirely separate tale of another Crusader and his lost love, recaptured from Zenghi's harem. It is a thrilling and absorbing story of blood, cruelty, vengeance, and retribution.

In spite of a distinctly optimistic tone by the editor of its readers' column, "The Souk," for January 1934, this issue of *Magic Carpet* was the last. Fortunately it contained another great story by Howard. "Shadow of the Vulture" tells of the days when Suleyman the Magnificent was besieging Vienna in 1529. Howard's hero this time, cut from the same cloth as his other mighty men, is Gottfried von Kalmbach, hard-drinking, hard-fighting black sheep of a noble German family. This story concerns the efforts of Suleyman to obtain Gottfried's head in exchange for a wound dealt him by Gottfried in battle some years earlier. Von Kalmbach alternately and sometimes simultaneously roisters and fights magnificently

throughout in company with a red-headed Russian she-cat who would have made a fit companion for Conan. In fact, she might have been a bit too much for him.

This should conclude the story of Howard's writings in *Oriental Stories/Magic Carpet*—but there is an epilogue. In this last, January 1934 issue there is a lineup of stories for the next issue, one that never appeared. One of these was a Howard story, "Gates of Empire," and one would suppose it was thus lost forever. However, some four years later a new magazine, *Golden Fleece*, made a brief appearance, and "Gates of Empire" was printed in its January 1939 issue.

The leading actor in the story is another noble toper, Giles Hobson, a Falstaffian character, and a bit of a departure in Howard heroes. Fat, shameless braggart and liar, sometimes cowardly, more often valiant fighter, he is also reminiscent of another fictional Giles, surnamed Habibula. Because of a drunken practical joke, Giles is forced to flee England and the wrath of his liege lord. He makes his way to the Holy Land, where he succeeds in spreading a modicum of consternation in both opposing camps.

All of Howard's heroes in these stories, with the possible exception of Giles, and with minor differences of name, national origin, hair color, and slight character variations, seem basically the same person. Call them Godric, Cormac, or Conan, they are also, it would seem, a delineation of the idealized version of Howard himself, as pictured in his fancy. Virile and mighty men of daring, who performed mighty deeds, they never forgive treachery or an injury, but give the last measure for a friend. Fearless and undaunted in the face of

danger and hopeless odds, they are never foolishly brave, and are ever practical—they know when to retreat. Even Conan could run away when it seemed expedient to do so.

It should be noted in passing that, as in most of his stories, Howard never lets romantic elements interfere overmuch with the more serious business of fighting, riding, and drinking. With the exception of a minor intrusion in "Red Blades of Black Cathay," you'll look hard to find a conventional boy-meets-girl story. Lonely, hard-bitten men, these Crusaders are interested mainly in winning favor and loot with their swords, although they are not entirely insensible to the ladies. Von Kalmbach and Sonia's form of togetherness, while reasonably proper, is not likely to be seen in a TV series. In his dour manner, Donald MacDeesa loved his little faithless nitwit, but this could hardly be called a grand romance, even on his part. Cormac FitzGeoffrey and some others got along almost unencumbered with feminine company. There's no doubt about it: Howard wrote for grown-up kids who once writhed in their seats with boredom when the cinema cowboy took time out to smooch anybody but his horse.



## **A GENT FROM CROSS PLAINS**

by  
**GLENN LORD**

ROBERT E. HOWARD is best remembered as the author of memorable fantasies about such virile heroes as Conan, King Kull, Solomon Kane, Bran Mak Morn, and others. He began to write in the genre of the weird and fantastic at about the age of eighteen and, while he continued to write for this market the remainder of his life, he also wrote in several other fields, among them the Western.

Apart from two or three weird tales set in the locale, Howard did not begin to publish in the Western field until 1934, a scant two years before his death. He created three characters around whom he wrote the majority of his Western tales: Breckinridge Elkins of Bear Creek, Nevada; Buckner J. Grimes of Knife River, Texas; and Pike Bearfield of Wolf Mountain, Texas.

The first Howard Western to see publication was "Mountain Man," a Breck Elkins tale which appeared in the March-April 1934 issue of *Action Stories*, which published all the Elkins stories except for four that appeared several years after Howard's death. Altogether, there are twenty-four Breck Elkins stories, and, in 1937, Herbert Jenkins

of London published thirteen of them in a volume entitled *A Gent From Bear Creek*. Three of the stories were written expressly for the book, and the other ten were slightly revised to give a semblance of chronological continuity to what otherwise were loosely connected short stories. For instance, Breck's girlfriend, Glory McGraw, does not appear in the magazine versions. *A Gent* was reprinted in the United States by Donald M. Grant in 1965, and this edition is now out of print. A second Breck Elkins collection, *The Pride of Bear Creek*, appeared in 1966, also from Grant. This contains seven of the Breck Elkins stories; since these were taken from magazine versions, they, of course, have little chronological continuity.

Breck Elkins is unlike the heroes of the average Western tale, for he is not the usual cowboy depicted in these melodramas. He is more akin to the backwoodsman or mountain man. To quote from the wrapper of the Jenkins edition of *A Gent From Bear Creek*:

Breckinridge Elkins, the gent from Bear Creek, is one of the most engaging characters it has been our good fortune to encounter for a very long time. Six and a half feet tall, possessing the strength of an ox and the modesty of a Munchausen, Breckinridge is the terror of the Humboldt Mountains. His adventures in Chawed Ear, War Paint, Grizzly Claw and other roaring towns of the plains, are related in the racy vernacular of the backwoods and make most hilarious and entertaining reading.

Although Breck Elkins was confined to Action

Stories, Howard created and sold a carbon copy of him to two other markets. To Street and Smith's *Cowbody Stories* he sold two stories about Buckner J. Grimes of Knife River, Texas. One of these, "A Man-Eating Leopard," is probably his best known Western. It was appearing in *Cowboy Stories* at the time of Howard's death, and the local newspaper, *The Cross Plains Review*, reprinted it in the June 19, 1936 issue. It also appeared in the omnibus collection of Howard's work, *Skull Face and Others* (Arkham House, 1946).

When Jack Byrne left Fiction House, publisher of *Action Stories*, in 1936 to join Munsey as editor of *Argosy*, Howard created a new character for him: Pike Bearfield of Wolf Mountain, Texas. Only three stories about this character appeared, due, no doubt, to the fact that Howard created this character only a few weeks before his death. One of the incidents from the Elkins saga is repeated almost verbatim in "Gents on the Lynch," a Pike Bearfield tale. *Argosy* also published a Western fantasy and a "straight" Western short story in 1936.

When *Action Stories* rejected "A Elkins Never Surrenders," Howard changed Elkins to Bearfield Elston, retitled the story "A Elston to the Rescue," and sold it to Popular Publications' *Star Western*, where it appeared in the September 1936 issue under the title "The Curly Wolf of Sawtooth."

Four Elkins tales appeared several years after Howard's death. The first of these, "Texas John Alden," appeared in 1944 in *Masked Rider Western* under the pen name Patrick Ervin. This was originally a Buckner J. Grimes tale entitled "A Ringtailed Tornado," and someone connected

with the Otis A. Kline literary agency—which was handling Howard's work—revised the story into an Elkins tale. I suspect that Kline himself was responsible for this. In 1956 a second Elkins tale, "While Smoke Rolled," appeared in *Double-Action Western*. This was originally a Pike Bearfield story, and again someone connected with the Kline agency—either Kline before his death in 1946, or Oscar J. Friend, his successor—had revised this into an Elkins tale. In 1966, when I uncovered the bulk of the Howard mss., I found two unpublished Elkins tales: "Mayhem and Taxes" and "The Peaceful Pilgrim"; the latter was a somewhat different first version of the published "Cupid from Bear Creek." These have appeared in *The Summit County Journal*, the weekly newspaper of Breckenridge, Colorado, which is serializing the entire Elkins series.

Why are Howard's Westerns superior to most of his other work? E. Hoffmann Price, in his "A Memory of R. E. Howard" (in *Skull-Face and Others*), had this to say: "Howard's material came from the land and the people of his childhood and his manhood. His characters, for all their Paul Bunyan exuberance, were real. They spoke the speech and moved in accord with the spirit of the country. . . . In his weird fiction, he had only his fancy and his poetry and his rebellion and his protest to carry him. The same could be said of his conventional adventure stories. In his Westerns, however, he had not only the spirit, but also, the facts, the locale, the characters, the stuff whereof his life had been shaped." Above all, Howard's Westerns are marked with a humor not to be found in his other stories. I am, of course, speaking of his Westerns in the Elkins and allied series. For

example, the opening paragraph of "High Horse Rampage" (*Action Stories*, August 1936), one of the Breck Elkins tales:

I got a letter from Aunt Saragosa Grimes the other day which said:

Dear Breckinridge:

I believe time is softenin' yore Cousin Bearfield Buckner's feeling toward you. He was over here to supper the other night jest after he shot the three Evans boys, and he was in the best humor I seen him in since he got back from Colorado. So I jest kind of casually mentioned you and he didn't turn near as purple as he used to every time he heered yore name mentioned. He just got a little green around the years, and that might have been on account of him choking on the b'ar meat he was eatin'. And all he said was he was going to beat yore brains out with a post oak maul if he ever ketched up with you, which is the mildest remark he's made about you since he got back to Texas. I believe he's practically give up the idee of scul-pin' you alive and leavin' you on the prarie for the buzzards with both laigs broke like he used to swear was his sole ambition. I believe in a year or so it would be safe for you to meet dear Cousin Bearfield, and if you do have to shoot him, I hope you'll be broadminded and shoot him in some place which ain't vital because after all you know it was yore fault to begin with. We air all well and nothin's happened to speak of except Joe Allison got a arm broke argyin' politics with Cousin Bearfield. Hopin' you air the same, I begs to remane,

Yore lovin' Ant Saragosa.

Had he lived, Howard might well have gone on to become an important regional writer.

## EDITING CONAN by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

BEFORE THE GNOME Press edition of *Conan the Conqueror* appeared in 1950, I had no idea that I should become Robert E. Howard's posthumous collaborator and ghost writer—the ghost of a ghost, as it were. I had never read Howard, save a couple of historical novelettes in *Golden Fleece* (1938-39), and I had not noted the name of the author. I had not met Conan because I had never been a regular reader of *Weird Tales*. I did not care for typical *Weird Tales* creepycrawlies, any one of which could have been titled “The Thing in My Coffin,” and had been unaware that *Weird Tales* published fiction of other kinds. My friends John D. Clark and P. Schuyler Miller had been Conan buffs during Howard's lifetime, but at that time they and I lived in Schenectady and New York, respectively, and I did not see them often enough to give them a chance to sell me on Conan.

*Conan the Conqueror* was therefore a stunning discovery. I quickly obtained a copy of *Skull-Face and Others* and borrowed Clark's volumes of

bound tearsheets of Conan stories from *Weird Tales*. Then, with the discovery of unpublished Howard manuscripts in 1951, I found myself, without really meaning to, up to the elbows in the Conan business and have been in it on and off ever since. I thought you might like to hear some of the problems of editing and completing Howard's stories, first for the Gnome Press collections and now for the Ace volumes.

In considering my labors of the last quarter-century, I am struck by the pre-eminently sound, unobtrusive prose style that the largely self-taught Howard evolved long before I came on the scene. His sentences were mostly of short to medium length and simple construction, as other writers learned to make their sentences after the Hemingway revolution of the thirties. Howard had the faculty of giving the impression of a highly colorful scene while making only a moderate use of adjectives and adverbs, an excess of which slows down the narrative. He painted his scenes with broad, quick, sure strokes, with few wasted words. Consider the opening paragraph of *Conan the Conqueror*:

The long tapers flickered, sending black shadows wavering across the walls, and the velvet tapestries rippled. Yet there was no wind in the chamber. Four men stood about the ebony table on which lay the green sarcophagus that gleamed like carven jade. In the upraised right hand of each man a curious black candle burned with a weird greenish light. Outside was night and a lost wind moaning among the black trees.

It would be hard to beat that paragraph as an



example of describing a scene and setting a mood for a story in vivid yet straightforward, economical prose. Some contemporary writers of imaginative fiction, who try to make up for a lack of interesting story to tell by stylistic eccentricities, could profit from a study of Howard's technique. The best style—at least, so I was taught and still believe to be true—is that of which the reader is entirely unaware while he is reading. To dazzle the reader by verbal pyrotechnics or to puzzle him by deliberate obscurities is to slow him down and to risk shattering the all-important spell of illusion that the writer has sought to cast upon him.

Howard also concocted ingenious plots, with the action following with reasonably tight logic from the basic assumptions and the loose ends neatly tied up. He was a devotee of the "well-wrought tale" as opposed to the "slice-of-life" school of fiction. Stories of either kind have their legitimate functions; but for pure, escapist entertainment—which the Conan stories are patently meant to be—narratives of the former type are more suitable. (I suspect that one thing wrong with much contemporary fantasy and science fiction is that many writers, influenced by realistic mainstream fiction, are trying to write slice-of-life stories in a genre ill-suited to them.)

An editor, therefore, has little occasion to exercise his craft either on Howard's plots or on his writing. Howard very rarely made an actual grammatical error. A purist might quibble over some fine points of his usage, such as the distinction between *which* and *that*, or *should* and *would*. In such matters, however, Howard's usage was normal literate American, even if it did not

always follow the rules of the most formal and elevated English prose.

Editing comes into play in dealing, firstly, with the results of Howard's haste and carelessness, and secondly in bringing Howard's spelling and punctuation into line with contemporary practice. Because Howard wrote so much so fast, his stories contain many inconsistencies. Sometimes he failed to check a story against the fictional biography of Conan that he carried in his notes or in his head, so that the tale implied chronological impossibilities.

Hence the original draft of "The Treasure of Trancos" (then called "The Black Stranger") had Conan, at the end, sailing off for another career of piracy after his Aquilonian frontier service. The original draft of "Wolves Beyond the Border" likewise indicated a gap of ten years or more between the events of "Beyond the Black River" and Conan's rise to kingship. But these assumptions would have put Conan well into his fifties when he became king, whereas Howard himself wrote that "Conan was about forty when he seized the crown of Aquilonia."

Other inconsistencies occur in the Gnome edition of *Conan the Conqueror*, where Conan's helmet—the same headpiece—is variously called a morion, a basinet, and a burganet. These were all real types of helmet, quite distinct. A few pages further on, Conan's horse falls and Conan is knocked unconscious. At the time of the fall, Conan's sword is in his hand; when he awakens to find a ghoul dragging him away, his sword is back in its sheath. In Chapter XIV, Conan is knocked senseless again; but then his attackers, instead of killing him with one good quick thrust or slash,

stand about arguing at length on whether or not to cut off his head. I ironed out these inconsistencies and condensed the dialogue to make it more plausible.

Howard's spelling was usually unexceptionable, save for spelling "surprise" as "surprize" (as the Simplified Spelling League was urging people to do back in Theodore Roosevelt's presidency) and "cannot" as "can not." In exotic names and words, however, Howard's orthography varied from story to story. Hence we find Akbatana/Akbitana, Asgalun/Askelon, Bakhariot/Bakhauriot, Cush/Kush, fête/fete, Hyrcanian/Hyrkanian, kaffia/kafieh, Khorusun/Khurusun, Khosala/Kosala, and naught/nought. His most egregious blunder was to call the capital of Aquilonia "Tamar" in "The Scarlet Citadel" but "Tarantia" in *Conan the Conqueror*. I have tried to eliminate these inconsistencies, in each case choosing the alternative that seemed the more plausible, scholarly, or attractive.

Howard also identified one of the Shemitic nations as the Pelishtim, which is the original Hebrew for "Philistines." But then Howard, no linguist, used "Pelishtim" in "Jewels of Gwahlur" as a singular noun, not knowing that the -m ending was a sign of the plural in Hebrew. I have taken the liberty of changing the singular to *Pelishti*, which is a more plausible Semitic ethnologism.

Most of my changes in Howard's text have been in punctuation. In some usages, I once did just what Howard did and have only learned better by subsequent study and by having many of my own books edited by competent editors at major book-publishing companies. Never having been published in book form during his lifetime, How-

ard missed this educational experience.

Another fault of Howard was to repeat certain elements in story after story: the combat with the gigantic serpent or the man-ape; the vast, green city built on the lines of the Pentagon; the flying menace in the form of a winged ape or demon. But I did not deem it my job to change these things, because the result, whether better or worse, would no longer have been Howard.

I thought I should pay some heed to Howard's tendency to bruise ethnic feelings and to step on ethnic toes, particularly Negroid ones. While I do not claim to be the world's most compassionate man, I feel that, since the purpose of the Conan saga is escapist entertainment and not the revelation of profound truths, there is no point in unnecessarily spitting in anyone's soup. If by a little tinkering that does not change the essential Howardness of a story, I can make it more enjoyable to an ethnic reader, I have no compunction about doing so. It is all very well for black fan Elliott Shorter to say he likes Conan and is not bothered by Howard's cracks at Negroes; not everybody is so objective about his digs at one's own ethnos.

Howard's ethnic attitude had elements of paradox. He wrote when national and racial stereotypes were the stock-in-trade of the fictioneer. Moreover, he was a Southerner with a fair share of conventional Southern white prejudice. His attitude towards Negroes was standard Southern white, modified by wide reading and by a romantic primitivism derived from Jack London and similar writers. Howard might view Negroes as irredeemably barbaric; but to him that was not altogether bad, since he thought barbarians had virtues lacking in civilized men. Here and there

one comes upon an unexpected flicker of sympathy for the abused blacks.

People hypersensitive to racism may with some justice call Howard a racist. But, considering his time and place, he was a comparatively mild and enlightened one. A few remarks about Shemites suggest the traditional hostile Christian stereotype of the Jew, but that did not stop him from making Bêlit one of his more attractive heroines. To judge from his writings, his ethnic prejudices (as with his pen pal Lovecraft) abated as he grew older, although it is of course idle speculation to guess how his attitudes would have evolved had he lived longer. If ethnocentrism be a vice, it is a vice that all but a tiny fraction of mankind has practiced throughout human history.

I have, therefore, made a few small adjustments to take the edge off Howard's most cutting ethnic remarks. These changes have been very slight, since it would be ridiculous to try to turn Howard posthumously into a civil-rights activist. In *Conan the Conqueror*, for instance, Howard spoke of Negroes' "ape-like speech." This term was not only abrasive but also absurd to anyone who knows about the complex, often musical African languages. When Wollheim edited *Conan the Conqueror* for the Ace edition of 1953, he changed "ape-like speech" to "strange dialect." When I did likewise for the Lancer (now Ace) edition, I changed "ape-like" to "guttural." That is not perfect, either, since most African tongues are not in fact guttural. But Howard seemed to think that they were.

In completing the unfinished Conan stories and in writing pastiches with my colleagues Nyberg and Carter, I have tried to adhere to the style and

spirit of Howard. How well I have succeeded in putting myself into Howard's skin is not for me to say. Readers may amuse themselves by guessing where, in stories like "Drums of Tombalku" and "Wolves Beyond the Border," Howard left off and I began.

Among the four stories by Howard, not about Conan, which I rewrote for the Gnome Press volume *Tales of Conan* (all of which have appeared in the Ace series), "The Bloodstained God," was originally a story laid in modern Afghanistan. The original title was "The Trail of the Blood-Stained God." The hero was Kirby O'Donnell, one of Howard's large fictional family of brawny, brawling Irish adventurers and the hero of the published tales "Swords of Shahrázar" and "The Treasures of Tartary."

"Hawks Over Shem" was originally "Hawks Over Egypt," laid in Cairo in +XI, in the reign of the mad Caliph Hakím. The hero of the original was a Spanish Christian warrior who comes to Cairo disguised to wreak vengeance on a Muslim who double-crossed him in the fighting among the multitude of little Christian and Muslim states into which Iberia was then sundered.

"The Road of the Eagles" began as a tale of the same name about an English adventurer in the sixteenth-century Turkish Empire.

Finally, "The Flame Knife" was originally called "Three-Bladed Doom," written in 1934 as a story of 42,000 words and, when it failed to sell, rewritten in 1935 to 24,000 words. The shortened version likewise failed to sell. It, too, was laid in modern Afghanistan. The hero was Francis X. Gordon, a fictional double of Kirby O'Connell and the hero of five published stories, such as "Blood

of the Gods" and "The Country of the Knife." The cult that O'Donnell exposes is a revival of the medieval sect of the Assassins. (Parenthetically, I lately read in Aly Mazahéri's *La Vie Quotidienne Des Musulmans Au Moyen Âge* that the Assassins were a kind of Arab resistance movement against the Turks, who, infiltrating the Caliphate from Central Asia as adventurers and mercenaries, had seized effective control of that vast realm and divided it up into a host of quasi-independent sultanates.)

In these four stories, the influence of Harold Lamb and of Talbot Mundy is plain to see. In all cases, my task was to change the hero to Conan (no great chore, since Howard's heroes were mostly cut from the same cloth); to rename the other people and places appropriately; to eliminate anachronisms like gunpowder; and to introduce a supernatural element. Thus the animated idol in "The Bloodstained God," the witch's spells in "Hawks Over Shem," the vampires in "The Road of the Eagles," and the ghouls in "The Flame Knife" are my doing. The stories, however, remain something like three-quarters or four-fifths Howard.

Howard's style is not hard for a reasonably competent prosaist to imitate; since it is so clean, straightforward, and unobtrusive. If one writes the best and clearest action narrative one can, it comes out pretty close to Howard, and it is easy to sprinkle in the little clichés and epithets to which he was addicted.

Altogether, as I look back, I am impressed by the fact that Howard managed to leave so few openings for editorial improvements. He was a real pro.





## HOWARD'S DETECTIVE STORIES by GLENN LORD

WHEN FICTION HOUSE temporarily suspended its line of pulps in 1932, Robert E. Howard lost one of his regular markets; the Sailor Steve Costigan series of sport adventure stories had been appearing in both *Action Stories* and *Fight Stories*. His only other regular market was Farnsworth Wright's magazines: *Weird Tales* and *Oriental Stories*, the latter publishing his historical adventure fiction. Wright paid Howard one cent a word; this in theory was paid upon publication, but in practice it was months after publication. Sales to other markets had been so widely scattered that the outlook, for a man who was attempting to earn a living by writing, was bleak.

In an effort to expand his markets, Howard engaged Otis Adelbert Kline as his literary agent early in 1933. And he began to extend the scope of his writing by turning out Western and detective stories. Although he had written, unsuccessfully, a few Westerns in the late 1920s, this was his first

venture into the detective field. It turned out to be somewhat less than successful.

Howard seems to have been aware from the beginning that detective stories were not his forte. In a letter to August Derleth (circa late 1933) he wrote: "Glad you found my 'Black Talons' (originally titled 'Talons in the Dark') in *Strange Detective* of some interest. You're right in saying that I don't have the feel for detectives that I do for weirds. However, I've been writing weirds for nine years, and 'Black Talons' was the first detective story that I ever wrote in my life. Daigh has a couple of other yarns, 'Teeth of Doom' and 'People of the Serpent,' which are better." Ralph Daigh was editor of *Strange Detective Stories*, a short-lived publication after its title change from *Nickel Detective*. "Black Talons" appeared in the December 1933 issue, while "People of the Serpent" appeared in the February 1934 issue under the title "Fangs of Gold." "Teeth of Doom" also appeared in the same issue, under the title "The Tomb's Secret" and under the by-line Patrick Ervin.

In another letter to Derleth, dated May 30, 1934, Howard wrote: "The suspension of *Strange Detective* lost me a market for my murder yarns, and I've had no luck with *Super-Detective* after the sale of one novelet." *Strange Detective Stories* folded with the February 1934 issue; a Howard story, "Dead Man's Doom," was announced in the last issue. This story, originally titled "Lord of the Dead," remains unpublished, while "Names in the Black Book," published in the May 1934 issue of *Super-Detective Stories*, is a sequel to it.

In early 1935, Howard wrote Derleth: "I've about decided to quit trying to write detective

yarns. I sold a few of them—the first one I ever wrote, in fact—but I can't seem to get the hang of the art. Maybe it's because I don't like to write them. I'd rather write adventure stuff." And in mid-1935: "I've given up trying to write detective yarns—a job I despise anyway—and am concentrating on adventure stuff."

However, two more detective stories—or, more properly, horror mysteries—"Graveyard Rats" and "Black Wind Blowing," appeared in 1936 in *Thrilling Mystery*. These may have been written sometime prior to Howard's decision to abandon detective stories.

A number of the detective stories had, as a central character, Steve Harrison, a tough, burly character who slugged and shot his way through the series. "Names in the Black Book," "Graveyard Rats," and "Fangs of Gold" were Harrison stories, as well as the unpublished "Lord of the Dead," "The Voice of Death," "The House of Suspicion," and "The Black Moon." "The Tomb's Secret" was originally a Harrison story, but when this appeared under a pen name in the same issue of *Strange Detective Stories* as "Fangs of Gold," Harrison was changed to Brock Rollins.

All of Howard's detective yarns have unusual—almost fantastic—elements: a leopard man from Africa ("Black Talons"), Mongolian cults ("The Tomb's Secret," "Names in the Black Book"), graveyard rats ("Graveyard Rats"), and a cult of devil-worshipers ("Black Wind Blowing"). The influence of Sax Rohmer, one of Howard's favorite authors, is evident. The villain of "Lord of the Dead," a sinister Oriental mastermind named Erlik Khan, is seemingly killed at the end of the story, but in "Names of the Black Book" we dis-

cover that he miraculously escaped death. Unfortunately, Howard never wrote another story revolving around this villain, so we don't know if his second "death" stuck or not. Shades of Fu Manchu!

# HOWARD AND THE RACES

by  
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

AS I HAVE written before, many of Robert E. Howard's views would today be stigmatized as "racist." He followed the example of most American authors of popular fiction of the period, in whose tales ethnic stereotypes were stock in trade. Hence Scots were always thrifty, Irishmen funny, Germans arrogant, Latins lecherous, Jews avaricious, Negroes childish, and Orientals sinister. He agreed with Lovecraft's rhapsodies on the non-existent "Aryan race" and his ranting against non-Nordic immigrants.

On the other hand, Howard was, if a racist, a comparatively mild one by the standards of his time. He noted the superior qualities of the industrious Bohemian immigrants to Texas. He sympathized with the Confederacy and expressed what one of his biographers calls a "deep distaste" for Abraham Lincoln. He voiced conventional Texan views of Negroes and Mexicans. At the same time, he praised individual Negroes and Mexicans whom he admired, as well as Jewish

prizefighters whom he had known. His story "Black Canaan" has gallant white men dashing about the Deep South to forestall nigger uprisings; while in "The Dead Remember," his sympathies are with a Negro couple abused and murdered by the narrator, a drunken, vicious cowboy.

One of his early story synopses, never transformed into a finished story, was called "The Last White Man." In this racial fantasy, the white race has become "decadent" from "idleness and pleasure," so the black Africans, "a new, strong race," rise up, conquer, and exterminate them with the help of the Orientals. The Orientals are then wiped out in their turn. But the blacks are "destroyers, not builders," who soon "revert to savagery."<sup>1</sup>

Howard's racial views, however, were not static, any more than those of his pen pal Lovecraft. Both seem to have evolved away from the crude tribalism which obtained in much American thinking of the early twentieth century. Later, as "John Tavel," Howard wrote a prizefight story, "The Apparition of the Prize Ring," published in *Ghost Stories* for April 1929.<sup>2</sup> While no immortal masterpiece, this story has an interesting feature. It emphasizes the mildness of Howard's racism; the author made a Negro prizefighter his hero. Ace Jessel, the "ebony giant," is described as clever, brave, good-natured, noble, indomitable, and unselfish. How many virtues do you want?

True, Ace speaks a "dese and dose" dialect. His antagonist, a "full-blooded Senegalese," is closer to the hostile stereotype of the Negro; thickset, with a "small bullet head . . . set squarely between

gigantic shoulders" and on his chest "a thick grizzle of matted hair."

My colleague Charles R. Saunders tells me that Jessel may be based either on Peter Jackson or on Harry Wills, black heavyweights of the 1890s and 1920s respectively. They were denied a chance at the world title when the then champions, Sullivan and Dempsey, drew the color line. Perhaps both suggested Howard's fictional character.

The Senegalese boxer (says Saunders) is probably based upon the Senegalese light-heavyweight, "Battling Siki," who held that title from 1922 to 1923. Siki was commonly called "a gorilla" in the press, and he "abetted this image with stunts like walking a pet lion down Broadway."<sup>3</sup>

Howard's handling of dialect, like that of his fellow pulpsters, was crude. His Senegalese shows the peril of writing about exotica with neither personal acquaintance nor intensive research. Most Senegalese are rather slender, and pure Negroes have practically no hair on their chests. But at least, the story shows that Howard was a lot less ethnocentric than many of his contemporaries.

1. *The Howard Collector*, No. 5, Summer 1964, pp. 22-29
2. Recently reprinted in *Stories of Ghosts* (Evergreen, Colo.: Opar Press). A second story about Ace Jessel was apparently never sold.
3. Letter from Saunders, November 26, 1976.





## THE CASE FOR SOLOMON KANE by JOHN POCSIK

DURING HIS SHORT life, Robert E. Howard gave to fantasy both an abundance of thrilling stories and a wealth of memorable characters. One cannot easily forget the bold and bloody Conan of Cimmeria, the mighty Kull of Atlantis, the mysterious Dark Man of the Picts—Bran Mak Morn, Turlough O'Brien, Sailor Steve Costigan, and many more. But there is one who, to my mind, stands out from all the rest of Howard's creations: Solomon Kane. Howard's dour English Puritan was one of his earliest series-characters and as such brought him much success and praise from the early readers of *Weird Tales*. After the creation and evolution of Conan, however, nothing was ever heard of Kane again. Now it is true that the best of the Puritan's adventures are preserved in "Skull-Face and Others," but there hasn't been much interest shown for him by Howard fans otherwise. This article is an attempt to resurrect Kane's popularity, which he well deserved; after all, if Conan can

survive his creator's death and keep on entertaining us with his gory escapades, why not Solomon Kane?

A study of Kane should begin with the events of his life as they were chronicled by Howard. Seven of these saw their way into print in various issues of "Weird Tales." I shall list them in the order of their publication and will give a brief summary of each.

1. "Red Shadows" (*Weird Tales*, August 1928) introduces Solomon Kane as a lonely wanderer, a fanatic Puritan who considers himself a vessel of God's wrath. Stumbling upon a girl who has been raped and stabbed by a notorious French bandit known as the Wolf, Kane vows vengeance and proceeds to knock off the bandit's outlaw band in various ways (for instance: he kills one man and carves his initials, S L K, on the dead man's breast) until only the Wolf himself is left. The Wolf escapes to Africa with Kane hot on his heels but is finally killed by Kane in a typical Howardian sword fight. It is in this tale also that Kane first meets the "ju-ju" man, N'Longa.

2. "The Moon of Skulls" (*Weird Tales*, June & July 1930) is a two-part serial telling of Kane's further adventures in the Dark Continent. This time he searches for an English girl, Marylin Taferel, who has been sold by her treacherous guardian to Moslem slave-traders. Kane finally finds her deep on the African interior where she is being held as a slave by Nakari, the black vampire-queen of the nightmare city of Negari. Kane is captured by feminine wiles (naturally) after surviving a fall from a swinging bridge and an encounter with a giant snake, but he manages to escape into the underground passages of Nega-

ri after refusing to mate with the queen. Marylin is made ready to be sacrificed to Nakura (notice the typical Howard nomenclature: Nakari, Negari, Nakura), God of the Skull, who rules the whole city through Nakari at the full of the moon. Kane comes upon a wretched creature in the dank tunnels who tells him that the people of Negari are the descendants of the Atlanteans and that they are ruled by the hideous power of Nakura. Kane rescues Marylin in the nick of time, destroying the power of Nakura in the process with a well-placed pistol ball, and carries Marylin from the bloody altar just as the black citadel of Negari and all of its horrid inhabitants perish in an earthquake.

3. "Skulls in the Stars" (*Weird Tales*, January 1929) switches the locale from the teeming jungles of Africa to the mist-shrouded uplands of England. One dark night as he journeys across the moors to Torkertown, Kane is attacked by a demon—who turned out to be the ghost of a man killed by his miserly cousin. Kane manages to fight off the ghost and then grimly sets out to avenge the man's death. The next night, Kane sets old Ezra the miser out upon the moors and watches as the spirit avenges its murder in an unpleasant manner.

4. "Rattle of Bones" (*Weird Tales*, June 1929) is the shortest Kane story that Howard ever wrote. It tells of the events which befell Kane when he spent the night at the mysterious "Cleft Skull Tavern" in the Black Forest. First he is held at bay by his "companion" who turns out to be a vicious French criminal. Next, the innkeeper (who has the quaint habit of decapitating guests in their beds) intervenes with an axe, permanently disposes of M. Gaston, and is just about to kill Kane

when the skeleton of a Russian sorcerer whom he starved to death kills the innkeeper. As a result of this rather confusing state of affairs, Kane decides to return to the more sophisticated terrors of the jungle.

5. "Hills of the Dead" (*Weird Tales*, August 1930) continues the further exploits of Kane in Africa. Once again, after a lapse of many years, he meets his old friend, N'Longa, who gives him a mysterious wooden staff for his protection. Kane ventures deep into the interior, rescues a native girl from a lion, and learns of a race of vampires living amid the barren hills in a walled city. Kane is ambushed by two of these vampires, but manages to destroy them with N'Longa's stave. With the help of the wizened, black sorcerer, he destroys all of the vampires utterly in one of the magnificently described battles so typical of Howard. This is one of the better Kane novelettes; it was therefore included in the Arkham House anthology.

6. "The Footfalls Within" (*Weird Tales*, September 1931) tells of Kane's efforts to rescue a group of Negroes who have been caught by Arab slave traders. Naturally, Kane is captured but he sends quite a few Arabs to Paradise before he is taken. The slave-train comes upon a brooding tomb in the jungle and the Arabs, always full of avarice, break into the tomb. Unfortunately for them, something breaks out at the same time and all hell breaks loose. Kane finally kills the thing with his "ju-ju" staff which he learns is the rod Moses and King Solomon once used. Although this story was the sixth published, chronologically it is the last of the Kane tales. When asked by the slaves whom he has freed to come and be their

king, Kane's only reply is: "I go eastward."

7. "Wings in the Night" (*Weird Tales*, July 1932) is, in my opinion, the best of the Kane tales. Pursued by cannibals, Kane comes upon a plateau where hideous winged men hold a native village in a grip of terror and levy a human sacrifice from them once a month. When Kane arrives upon the scene, he is attacked by two of these creatures, but he manages to kill them both; sustaining grievous wounds in the process. Because of this the natives hold him to be some sort of white god and refuse to offer further sacrifices to the Harpies. One dark night, the whole village is attacked and all its inhabitants killed, save for Kane who goes mad when the Harpies retreat into the air from his bloody axe, carrying their screaming victims with them. Severed limbs and torrents of blood rain down on him while Kane storms about cursing the gods and cursing man who allows himself to be the butt of Fate. Kane finally manages to kill the whole Harpy nation in one big slaughter and regains his sanity when the bloody deed is done. The story ends with Kane's memorable prayer of thanks. With this story, the last ever written and published, Howard had evolved Solomon Kane to the perfection that Conan was to reach later on, but for some reason Howard chose not to tell any more of Solomon Kane.

Besides the seven published stories, Howard wrote another story of Kane, "The Blue Flame of Vengeance," which contains a great amount of swordplay but no fantasy element. Unfortunately, this story was never published. There are also two long poems dealing with the gloomy Puritan. One, "Solomon Kane's Homecoming," was published; it tells of Kane's return to Devon, that he

might settle down. In a tavern, he remembers his various adventures and tells himself that he must not travel anymore. But the wanderlust comes upon him and he is unable, as in the past, to overcome it. He leaves Devon and is never seen again. The other poem, "The One Black Stain," never published, tells of Kane's revolt against Francis Drake when the latter put to death a rebel captain without a fair trial. Kane is put in irons but escapes, seeking to kill Drake. He finds Drake in tears, and this causes Kane to stay his hand.

In each of the Kane stories, we find references to events in Kane's life which Howard did not attempt to chronicle. Kane has fought against the Dons, both with Drake and with Richard Grenville; he has been held in the dungeons of the Inquisition and has been tortured on the racks of Spain. He was a galley slave for the Turks and worked in the Barbary vineyards. He must have traveled widely for we learn that he has killed Indians in the New Lands. He must have known Queen Elizabeth and at one time been in her service. But there are many questions that need to be answered, among them the following: What was Kane's final fate? Did he ever find peace and solitude before he died? Or did he, as is more probable, die violently? What caused him to wander over the ends of the earth? What was his early life like? Did he ever love a woman? How did he escape the Spaniards?

Solomon Kane has been compared with many other heroes of English literature: the man called Strider, hero of Tolkien's Ring epic; the characters of Dumas. Just what sort of a person was he? The answer to that question is to be found in the story "Red Shadows," where Howard describes him as

a tall man, clad in black from head to foot in plain, close-fitting garments that somehow suited his somber face. Kane has the long arms and broad shoulders which betoken the born swordsman. His features are saturnine and gloomy, and he has a kind of pallor which lends him a ghostly appearance in uncertain light, an effect which is heightened by the satanic darkness of his lowering brows. He has large, deep-set eyes; the mephistophelean trend of his lower features is offset by his high, broad forehead. That forehead marks a dreamer, an idealist, an introvert (can this be Howard describing himself as he saw himself?), just as his eyes and thin, straight nose betray the fanatic. Gazing into his eyes, Howard tells us, one has the impression of gazing into fathoms of ice.

Solomon Kane is markedly different from the rest of Howard's heroes mainly because of his restraint and religious aloofness. The fiery Conan has no qualms about rape\*, but that to Kane would be shocking. In Kane there is something of the tragic, something which Maturin infused into his Melmoth. One can almost believe in Kane and feel sorrow for his loneliness. And always after every battle, Kane gives thanks to a God he wants, in his own humble way, to believe in. I think that Howard infused Kane with something of his own tragic spirit. It is for these reasons that I believe Kane should at least be given a place of recognition by Howard fans.

Perhaps someday a young writer will resurrect Solomon Kane and infuse in him the same spirit Howard was able to. Kane may wander again,

\*Read "fornication." Conan boasts that he has never forced a woman against her will.

striving to find the end of his wanderings. Maybe, as Kull met Bran Mak Morn, Solomon might meet Conan—what would be the outcome of such a meeting?



## STIRRUPS AND SCHOLARSHIP

by  
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

DR. LYNN WHITE, JR., is professor emeritus of the University of California at Los Angeles and a leading American historian. His specialty is European medieval history and particularly medieval science and technology. His works include *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford University Press, 1962). One of the three sections of this book is about the effect of the introduction of the stirrup on warfare and the development of feudalism. In a recent article, "The Study of Medieval Technology, 1924-1974: Personal Reflections" (*Technology and Culture*, XVI, 4, Oct. 1975, pp. 519-30). Dr. White explains how the evolution of the stirrup became a matter of personal interest to him (reprinted by permission of Dr. White):

"Perhaps because of adolescent experiences, however, and the sense of personal peril involved in the issue, it was Lefebvre des Noëttes's study of the stirrup that most seized my imagination. From 1918 to 1924 I was badly schooled in a

California military academy that operated at the technological level of the Spanish-American War. I learned to ride bareback and have detested horses ever since. My enthusiasm for the stirrup was confirmed by the more advanced stages of cavalry training. Since the spear was never widely used in North American armies, I am no lancer. I am, however, probably the only living American medievalist who has ever taken part in a charge at full gallop by a line of cavalry with sabers bared. We yelled like Comanches less to terrify the hypothetical foe than to encourage ourselves in the face of the possibility that the horse might stumble. Our stirrups were a notable consolation. Those who doubt that the coming of the stirrup opened new possibilities in mounted warfare (although it did not demand them) are invited to ride stirrupless in strenuous cavalry maneuvers. Lefebvre des Noëttes dated the arrival of the stirrup in western Europe in the late Carolingian period, and noted that the stirrup is the technical presupposition of the typical medieval method of knightly combat with lance held at rest under the right arm."

Some of my fellow Conaniacs have wondered why I became a Howard fan so late, instead of back in the thirties when Howard was writing. This was just dumb luck. Once in that earlier time, I missed by a hairsbreadth. In 1930, when I was fresh out of California Tech, I picked up a copy of *Weird Tales* for November at a newsstand and glanced at the story "Kings of the Night." The first sentence that caught my eye read:

"The oncoming Romans shouted vengefully and quickened their pace as the frightened horse raced by, a ghastly travesty of a man, foot caught

in the stirrup, trailing beneath the pounding hoofs."

Even then, I knew that Roman horsemen lacked stirrups. Phooey! I said; this fellow doesn't know what he's talking about. So I put the magazine back and never became seriously interested in Howard until twenty years later.



# HOWARD'S CTHULOID TALES

by  
BEN SOLON

WHEN H. P. LOVECRAFT wrote "The Call of Cthulhu" in 1928, he didn't realize what he was letting himself in for. The next few years saw him become the guiding light of the so-called Lovecraft school of weird fiction writing. This group of authors included some of the most outstanding fantasy authors of the time: Robert Bloch, August Derleth, Robert E. Howard, Henry Kuttner, C. L. Moore, Seabury Quinn, Clark Ashton Smith, and Manly Wade Wellman.

During their heyday, the members of the Lovecraft Circle all but ruled *Weird Tales*. The years 1931-39 saw gods added to the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon and books added to the reference shelf—a shelf already laden with such weighty tomes as *The Necronomicon*, *The Book of Elbon*, and the unspeakable and almost unpronounceable *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*—at a fantastic rate. During this period, hardly an issue of *Weird Tales* went by without a new Cthulhu Mythos yarn or a

story outside the Mythos by a member of the Circle. However, most of the "Cthulhu" stories are of rather mediocre quality, being little more than imitations—and oftentimes quite amateurish imitations—of Lovecraft's style and technique.

Only two members of this School ever shared the *Weird Tales* spotlight with H. P. Lovecraft to any extent. These two are, of course, Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith. Neither Smith nor Howard wrote exclusively within the limits of the Cthulhu Mythos: of Smith's total production, only ten belong to the Mythos; and of Howard's two-hundred-plus stories, only four can be called Cthuloid. It is interesting to note that while Smith's contributions to the Mythos are among his finest stories, Howard's are little better (but certainly no worse) than those of the other Lovecraft imitators.

It is well known that Howard experimented, with indifferent success, with various styles of writing before hitting upon the style that was to characterize his best work. The best of these experiments, an insipid pastiche of Sax Rohmer's *Fu Manchu* stories, "Skull-Face," is a perfect example of how not to pastiche: Howard not only imitated Rohmer's good points (what few there are), he also duplicated his many faults. Unfortunately, the same is true of Robert E. Howard's essays into the field of the Lovecraftian horror story. However, Howard was intelligent enough to realize that he could not write effectively of the "unspeakable horrors that lie beyond life's edge" and soon abandoned the genre for the prehistoric adventure fantasies that were to bring him his greatest success.

In creating the Hyborian Age, Howard used a

portion of the Cthulhu Mythos as background material. The result of this is one of the most realistic "worlds" in modern fantasy fiction; a world that ranks with J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth and L. Sprague de Camp's worlds of if for originality, continuity, and accurate self-consistency. This realism stems, I believe, from the fact that Howard placed definite limits on his world and didn't try to exceed or alter them.

Howard's greatest single addition to the Mythos is the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (Nameless Cults) of Von Junzt. Von Junzt was born in 1795 and died in a "locked and bolted chamber with the marks of taloned fingers on his throat" in 1840. He was said to have travelled the world and gained entrance to innumerable secret societies and cults. His *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* sets down the innermost secrets of these organizations, and if we are to believe the scribe, the information contained in the *Black Book* (as the book is also known) is but a fraction of the knowledge that Von Junzt gained. For when his closest friend, Alexis Ladeau, read the closely written pages of the unpublished manuscript, the scattered pages of which were found with Von Junzt's body, he burned it and then cut his own throat with a razor.

Howard's four Cthulhu Mythos stories were published in *Weird Tales* and later by Arkham House in their two Howard collections: *Skull-Face and Others* (1946) and *The Dark Man and Others* (1963); also in the paperback collection *Wolfshead* (Lancer Books, 1968). I shall give short summaries of each in the following paragraphs:

"The Thing on the Roof" (*Weird Tales*, Feb. 1932; *The Dark Man and Others*, 1946) is a typical

Cthulu Mythos story: everything is so unspeakable that it's almost blasphemous. The story tells of Tussman, the only named character in the entire corpus, who, while seeking the treasure of the Temple of the Toad, releases the demon that resides therein. This demon follows Tussman back to England and kills him in the approved manner.

"Dig Me No Grave" (*Weird Tales*, Feb. 1937; *The Dark Man and Others*, 1963) is only slightly Cthuloid, being the story of a man, John Grimlan, who sold his soul to Malik Tous in exchange for longer (about three hundred years longer) life, and what happened when Peacock Lord came to claim what was owed him. This tale is noteworthy because Howard, unlike many of his contemporaries, was aware that the Yezidees of Mount Alamout worshipped Malik Tous rather than Erlik Khan as Robert W. Chambers's *Slayer of Souls* would have us believe.

"The Fire of Asshurbanipal" (*Weird Tales*, Dec. 1936; *Skull-Face and Others*, 1946; *Wolfshead*, 1968) is probably the best of Howard's Cthulhu Mythos stories. This is because the accent is on characterization rather than on supernatural phenomena, which surprisingly enough play a somewhat minor role in the story. I strongly suspect that "The Fire of Asshurbanipal" was originally written as a straight adventure story; and when it didn't sell as such, Howard rewrote it into a *Weird Tales* type story.

"The Black Stone" (*Weird Tales*, Nov. 1931; *Sleep No More*; *Arkham House*, 1944; *Skull-Face and Others*, 1946; *Wolfshead*, 1968) is a better-than-average Cthuloid tale. The story is concerned with a prehuman monolith located in the wilds of Hungary and its effect upon anyone who



chances to sleep near it. I have one minor cavil about this story: if everyone who sleeps near the Stone on Midsummer Night is driven mad, why wasn't the protagonist of the story driven mad too?

Of these four stories, the most readable are "The Black Stone" and "The Fire of Asshurbanipal"; the others are no better than the other Lovecraft pastiches that were written at about that time. They are, for the most part, bogged down by Aryan racism and speculation on racial origins in the same manner that some of Lovecraft's tales are mired in endless masses of chronological and ancestral data.

Although none of Howard's heroic fantasies could, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a Cthulhu story, the elements of the Mythos occasionally creep in. Bran Mak Morn's curse against the Romans in "Worms of the Earth" runs: "Black gods of R'lyeh, even you would I invoke to the ruin and destruction of these butchers!" Also there are King Kull's encounter with the Serpent-Men of Valusia, creatures that serve Yig, Father of Serpents, in "The Shadow Kingdom"; and Conan's walk, during the dream sequence in "Phoenix on the Sword," down an aisle lined with the images of the Nameless Old Ones. . . .

In conclusion, we can say that Howard's use of the Cthulhu Mythos served a twofold purpose: first, the Mythos provided the necessary background of sorcery for the Hyborian Age; and second, the Mythos provided a vehicle upon which the budding Howard, perhaps under the tutelage of Lovecraft, could work at smoothing out his writing technique and experiment with writing styles other than his own.



# **HOWARD'S COLLEAGUES**



# CONTROLLED ANACHRONISM

by  
BY FRITZ LEIBER

*The Once and Future King*, by T. H. White, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958 (Contents: *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, *The Ill-Made Knight*, and *The Candle in the Wind*).

*The Sword in the Stone*, by T. H. White, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

*The Witch in the Wood*, by T. H. White, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

*The Ill-Made Knight*, by T. H. White, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940.

These books by Terence Hanbury White, well-known to many of us, I'm sure, are the most amusing and readable introductions yet to the legends of King Arthur and the knights of his Round Table, as compiled in English by Sir Thomas Malory around 1470, when Edward IV, next to the last of the "medieval" Yorkist kings, ruled England and fifteen years before the "modern" Tudors took over.

They contain more entertaining and knowledgeable material than any other books of fiction I

know, about such swordly topics as jousting, sword-fighting in full armor, archery, falconry, the chase, and medieval fortifications. While for a grisly bit of sorcery, just consider the Spancel, used to enforce love on a person and named for the rope with which domestic animals are hobbled: "It was a tape of human skin, cut from the silhouette of a dead man. That is to say, the cut had been begun at the right shoulder, and the knife—going carefully in a double slit so as to make a tape—had gone down the outside of the right arm, round the outer edge of each finger as if along the seams of a glove, and up on the inside of the arm to the arm-pit . . ." and so in similar fashion around the whole body.

To narrate his story in the richest and most telling way possible, White uses the method of controlled anachronism: that is, in setting forth a character, he considers the whole spectrum of British behavior over the centuries and picks the time and type which will be most easily recognized and revealing. For instance, Morgan le Fay looks and behaves rather like a haughty Vogue model; Galahad is a perfectionistic, vegetarian, at least latently homosexual prig; Sir Ector, guardian of the boy Arthur (nicknamed the Wart) is a port-drinkin', fox-huntin', farmin' country squire, perhaps of Boer War times yet with considerable resemblances to Squire Western in *Tom Jones*; Palomides is a babu; Mordred and Agravaine cynical, self-satirizing, young ultramoderns, though Mordred also has similarities to Richard III; and so on. Also, White does not hesitate to introduce into Arthur's time Robin Hood and his Merry Men, early Irish hermits, all sorts of Victorian and Edwardian bric-a-brac, mention of psychoanalysis

and modern science, etc.

In lesser hands this method would result at best in slapstick, but White does it so thoughtfully and lovingly that the results, while hilarious, ring clear and true. He spent a great deal of his writing life on these books, waiting twenty years to publish the last volume and at the same time doing a major revision of the first three.

I am writing this article in part to investigate that revision—the why of it, and whether it was on the whole for better or worse—and also in part to show the light thrown on it by another Arthurian fantasy, one of the most seminal works of speculative fiction in our times: Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (copyright 1889 and 1890 by Samuel L. Clemens; I used a Harper edition illustrated by Henry Pitz).

In their evaluation of old and recent England, White and Twain are just about as far apart as two men could be. White revered England, particularly the England that existed before the two world wars, the Edwardian England which he felt to be stable and benign. He pictures the modern squire and the equivalent knight of olden times as good, matey men, kindly towards their tenants, joining in the farm work, and so on. An ardent conservationist, he particularly loved the balance of nature and civilization he found in the English countryside. He admired the Dark and Middle Ages, the England that was Arthur's Gramarye, with the wilful extravagance of a doting lover: their architecture was great, their stained glass grand, any slave could hope to rise and likely manage it, a peasant could become Pope, "It was the age of fullness, the age of wading into everything up to the neck," there were many clerks and

every one a man of culture, they had scientists called magicians who "knew several secrets which we have lost today. . . . One of them, who was called Baptista Porta, seems to have invented the cinema—though he sensibly decided not to develop it. As for aircraft, in the tenth century a monk called Aethelmaer was experimenting with them, and might have succeeded but for an accident in adjusting his tail unit." They even had fiercer sounding cocktails than we do: Mad Dog, Dragon's Milke, Father Whoreson!

But it was the Angles, Saxons, and Normans he loved—no others. Once he lets fly against the Gaels: "They were the race, now represented by the Irish Republican Army rather than by the Scots Nationalists, who had always murdered landlords and blamed them for being murdered—the race which had been expelled by the volcano of history into the far quarters of the globe, with a venomous sense of grievance and inferiority, they even nowadays proclaim their ancient megalomania."

Twain, on the other hand, took the usual American view that the English were the stuffy, slow-witted, hard-hearted, overbearing, king-worshipping folk against whom we had gloriously revolted just a hundred years before. The Middle Ages were a time of ignorance, inhumanity, filth and bad language. Twain took a special and doubtless slyly hypocritical delight in reminding his readers that highborn men and women in those days used four-letter words all the time. He also implied that nineteenth-century British aristocrats were almost as bad. Most women were sluts; the pure woman of the late nineteenth century had not arrived. "The humblest hello-girl along



ten thousand miles of wire could teach gentleness, patience, modesty, manners to the highest duchess in Arthur's land."

But the worst thing was the ignorance. Even the best people of Arthur's time were no more than kindly muttonheads—except for the children—you could always teach children. Behind all this stupidity and immorality, and ultimate author of most of it, was the Roman Catholic and later the Anglican Churches. "Any Established Church is an established crime, an established slave-pen."

A Connecticut Yankee has been called "a noble and passionate expression of an ideal of freedom" by the Canadian humorist and economist Stephen Leacock. True enough, Twain hammers home the poverty, misery, and horror of the life of an English serf quite as detailedly as Victor Hugo does in *The Man Who Laughs*, while his remarks about the French Revolution are enough to make a Republican Rightist's teeth curl and even an American of the moderate left blanch to his eyeballs (and serve 'em right!):

All gentle cant and philosophizing to the contrary notwithstanding, no people in the world ever did achieve their freedom by goody-goody talk and moral suasion: it being immutable law that all revolutions that will succeed must begin in blood, whatever may answer afterward. If history teaches anything, it teaches that . . . the ever memorable and blessed French Revolution, which swept a thousand years of villainy away in one swift tidal wave of blood—one: a settlement of that hoary debt in the proportion of half a drop of blood for each hogshead of it that had been pressed by slow tortures out of the people in the

weary stretch of ten centuries of wrong and shame and misery the like of which was not to be mated but in hell. There were two 'Reigns of Terror,' if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood. . . . A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we all have been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us had been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.

One should remember that the serfdom Twain knew about at first hand was that of the Southern Negroes during his youth before the Civil War and which had been reestablished by the Ku Klux Klan, Northern indifference, and the compromises of the Tilden-Hayes election just ten years before *A Connecticut Yankee* was published.

Despite these great differences in outlook between White and Twain, there are many similarities in their fantasies of Arthur's court, in part due to their common basis in Malory and some almost inevitable parallel extrapolations from his tales, and in some small part at least to the influence of Twain's book on White.

1. Mere dates aside, both set their stories with scenery that came from nowhere but the peak of the Middle Ages, as Malory himself did. Twain has his hero, the Yankee from Connecticut, carried back through time—as a result of a bash on the head he gets while trying by brute force to assert his authority over a worker in his factory—to the year 528 A.D., where he immediately proves his

superiority to Merlin as a sorcerer by successfully foretelling an eclipse of the sun (a handy little device subsequently and widely used by time-travelers and roamers in savage lands; total eclipses of the sun, with fair weather to view them in, always turn up conveniently), yet the England he finds has the feel of the thirteenth or fourteenth century: there are knights in chain and plate armor, a well-developed code of chivalry, the Church is behaving at its pre-Reformation nastiest except for an occasional kindly priest here and there, etc.

Likewise White says straight out that Arthur was "the patron saint of chivalry. He was not a distressed Briton hopping about in a suit of woad in the fifth century [which, incidentally, is about what Treece makes him in *The Great Captains*], nor yet one of those *nouveaux riches de la Poles*, who must have afflicted the last years of Malory himself. Arthur was the heart's king of a chivalry which had reached its flower perhaps two hundred years before our antiquarian author had begun to work. He was the badge of everything that was good in the Middle Ages." Sometimes White's Gramarye sounds barely post-Conquest, the Norman sahibs among the Saxon and Gaelic natives. But if we must pick his real King Arthur, he was likely Edward III, whom White calls, "the supposed King Edward III," father of Edward the Black Prince and also of the founders of the houses of York and Lancaster.

2. White's Merlin is a wise, lovable, and absentminded gent who comes traveling backwards through time to be Arthur's tutor from some undetermined point in the future which at any rate has close relations with Alice's Wonderland. He

brings the Wart a certain spotty knowledge of the immediate future (remember his absentmindedness) but more important a general, partly scientific human understanding which will enable the Wart to rule wisely. Most important of all, Merlin has the ability to change the Wart, for short periods and one time only, into various animals—a fish, an ant, a snake, a hawk, a goose, a badger, an owl—in order to learn about human life and motivations by understanding those of animals. These sections, which are told with a finely realistic imagination and may alone make *The Sword in the Stone* an adult-juvenile classic on the order of *Huckleberry Finn*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, and Walter de la Mare's *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, really make Merlin serve as a sort of improved medieval bestiary, a class of books which sought to inculcate morality by describing the largely imagined vices and virtues of animals. One of White's last books was *The Book of Beasts: A Translation of a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*.

Merlin's counterpart in *A Connecticut Yankee* is not Merlin (Twain's Merlin is a brazen, bombastic personification of fakery, who works sorcery like the King in *Huck Finn* works a camp meeting) but the Yankee himself, who as Sir Boss becomes Arthur's factotum, holding great powers and warring everywhere against ignorance rather than giants or cruel knights, and immediately setting up, with no more explanation than Yankee ingenuity, a secret culture of telegraph systems and dynamite and bicycle and revolver factories, with technical colleges for promising young peasants. He has large stores of insulated wire, dynamite, and electricity in a few weeks. This exasperating

impossibility apparently didn't bother Twain in the least—he was a careless giant of early speculative fiction who didn't strive for consistency in a fantasy and changed the rules whenever he felt like it—but it has inspired numerous speculative tales seeking to discover just how much a modern man might actually do under those circumstances. The best of these is L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall*, the hero of which is catapulted by a lightning flash into the late Western Roman Empire. He and the Yankee agree in deciding that one very practical thing to do would be to build a printing press—that was one mechanical thing Twain knew from experience, while de Camp imagines the problems that come up and suggests plausible solutions—yes, build a printing press and start a court newspaper—and both authors manage to squeeze a good deal of fun from what such a newspaper and its mistakes would have been like; both authors also knew the value of a patent office to the growth of technology—so Twain has Sir Boss set one up as almost his first official act, while de Camp refrains from stepping over that way into a different sort of fantasy.

3. Both White and Twain agreed that the Rule of Might without Right was a Bad Thing and had no sympathy whatever for evil knights like Sir Bruce Saunce Pité who dashed around safe in their armor, choppin' off maidens' heads and committing other enormities. Sir Boss first dealt with this by making the knights ridiculous by persuading them to become sandwich men, wearing outside their armor boards advertising soap and such. Later he shoots them down in tournaments with a Colt-type revolver from one of his factories. Finally, in one of those ridiculous yet sickening

nightmares of rage of which Twain was capable, he has Sir Boss and his handful of youthful allies blow up all their secret schools and telegraph stations and factories and then kill off 25,000 (yup, 25,000) armored knights with gatling guns and electrified fences (de Camp here would have investigated the possibility that a knight's plate armor would harmlessly ground any such charge). In a final ripple of illogic, Merlin appears in the horrid stench of 25,000 corpses and charms the Yankee into a sleep which will last for thirteen centuries, so that he will wake up just in time to tell his story to one Samuel L. Clemens.

Earlier in the book Sir Boss says, "What this folk needed, then, was a Reign of Terror and a guillotine, and I was the wrong man for them." Untrue. He turned out to be the right man.

Once Sir Boss says, "Well, there are times when one would like to hang the whole human race and finish the farce." Twain quite often felt that way.

By contrast, White's Arthur is far gentler and more realistic. Psychoanalytically educated by Merlin, he sees that the underlying problem is how to channel the aggressive and destructive drives of all knights, while achieving general reform. Telescoping at least several centuries in the history of idealism, he first tries making Might serve Right: there will be quests against giants, ogres, and obviously wicked knights like Sir Bruce; this program comes to an end when all such have been killed or reformed and the remaining large chunk of destructiveness is more or less equally shared between all the surviving knights; there has been some improvement, but the basic problem remains unsolved.

Arthur next makes Might serve Piety: there will

be quests for the Holy Grail and other relics. The second program quickly ends with the discovery of some relics, the fading of a few uncomfortably pious and priggishly innocent knights like Galahad into the mystic distance, and the realization by the rest of the knights that unworldly self-abnegation is not for them, that they can't live on such an ethereal diet.

Finally Arthur makes Might serve Law or Justice. Though progress is made, the Third Program ends rather quickly too with the King's realization of his own guilts and shortcomings, and with the thunder across Salisbury Plain of the cannon of Mordred, who has become a sort of British fascist. Wearily the King muses on the battle tomorrow in which his best men, but Mordred too, will die and he himself take the road to Avilion, there to sleep until some future hour of England's need. He tells his story in simplest form to a thirteen-year-old page—apparently the youthful Thomas Malory, another clue that Arthur might be Edward III—and he thinks his last thoughts of how Might will poison things until nations learn to live without greed or fear, while retaining individuality:

Nations did not need to have the same kind of civilization, nor the same kind of leader, any more than the puffins and the guillemots did. They could keep their own civilizations, like Esquimaux and Hottentots, if they would give each other freedom of trade and free passage and access to the world. Countries would have to become counties, but counties which could keep their own culture and local laws. The imaginary lines on the earth's surface only needed to be unimagined. The airborne birds skipped them by nature.

How mad the frontiers would seem to Man if he could learn to fly.

Both Twain and White were obviously touched by the triangular love story of Guenever, Lancelot, and Arthur, and with the side-affairs with Elaine and Queen Morgause, and did not tamper with them or use them to get laughs—though Twain cannot resist saying about Guenever that, “take her all around she was pretty slack.” Both men were bigger-hearted than their biases: though making Arthur tyrannous and mutton-headed, Twain can’t resist painting a heroic picture of him proudly risking death to comfort a peasant woman dying of smallpox; later he dissolves into literary tears at a kindly priest promising to care for the child of a girl about to be hanged; while White is almost as much in love with the Gaelic sons of Queen Morgause—Gawaine, Gareth, and the rest—as he is with Arthur and Lance.

5. Both have a keen sense of practical humor, or rather humor in the practical—in things. Twain has some marvelous chapters about the discomforts of living in armor: he sweats and can’t wipe, he itches and can’t scratch, a fly gets in his helmet, it rains and all manner of insects seek shelter inside his armor, etc., while White describes a charming joust between two knights who don’t come within yards of hitting each other and finally go blundering off through a forest in opposite directions.

A few words now to finish off Twain’s book. To some readers he may overdo and make overlong the scenes of pathos—dying children, broken-down prisoners, etc.—but that was prime literary fare in the last century. Same goes for long-



drawn-out expositions of the stupidity of medieval folk—high mental densities at which his Yankee hammers rather maliciously but in vain; yet at least in this way Twain is able to hammer home to his contemporary readers some basic facts of economics—the difference between money and the buying power of money—which they probably didn't understand any too well. He quotes passages of Malory at length to prove how boring they were, deliberately making them more boring by starting them off unexplained in the middle. He even suggests having Irish knights talk brogue to liven the book: " 'In this country, be jabers, come never knight since it was christened, but he found strange adventures, be jabers.' You can see how much better that sounds."

White throws more light by explaining how detailed scores of tournaments were as interesting to enthusiasts then as are those of football games and cricket matches to sporting folk today, while incomprehensibly boring to outsiders.

Like White, Twain made considerable use of anachronism, but solely for laughs. Lancelot and his knights coming to the rescue of Arthur a precious hour early by riding bicycles (over the British roads of 528?) is a fair example.

Twain devotes a great deal of his book to convincing the reader of the boringness of the Middle Ages; this certainly scores a sound point against people like White, for instance, who in retrospect glorify such time, forgetting what a painful and long hiatus there was (almost two thousand years) between the first flowering of the spirit of inquiry in ancient Athens and early Hellenic times and its slow rebirth, a sort of winter growth, beginning in

the Renaissance. Yet he devotes so much space to putting over this point—long inapropos quotations from Malory, people who talk in a similar style with long sentences that never get to the point, pages spent to demonstrate the denseness of characters who cannot understand a simple remark by the Yankee (they go on and on misinterpreting—and on and on and on)—that at times he bores the reader almost in the fashion of the young intellectual writer who announces pretentiously “My story is dull . . . because life itself is dull!” And yet for all of that, Twain’s battle against ignorance and for education in *A Connecticut Yankee* and other books had a decisive effect on, or forecast a trend in most subsequent speculative fiction. H. G. Wells made it the underlying theme of all his fiction, to such a degree that he largely gave up fiction to write popular books on history and science and to work at adult education in other ways, and the whole field has ever since made propaganda for education one of its continuing purposes, with marked effect on public attitude.

The same goes for Twain’s fictional bludgeonings of the reader to make him empathic toward the sufferings of others and fixedly desirous of individual human freedom. This, with more or less of the bludgeoning, has become another basic characteristic of much speculative fiction.

White, for instance (we leave Twain now and return to *The Once and Future King*), manages the same thing in a positive rather than negative way. While making a quick point here and there against the stupidity and blinkered selfishness Arthur was fighting, he depends mostly on showing us the delights of increased awareness—as in the

Wart's many experiences of what it is to be an animal; animals illuminate man, and man animals; how interesting the world becomes if we learn to let our minds range across space and time and change viewpoints readily, making our motto "No Awareness Is Foreign to Us"; in fact the whole book and especially Merlin's tutoring of the Wart is a rich fictional demonstration of education by discovery; while the constant darting about in time and space, the swift changes in viewpoint, do not have the dulling effect of a surrealist hodgepodge—one grotesque vision after another taking us nowhere but into the fringes of the subconscious of the writer—but leave us each time a little more clear-eyed and desirous of becoming more so.

The first and twenty-years-later versions of *The Once and Future King* are an interesting matter and important to understand for one first tackling the books. White did a perfect job on the first *Sword in the Stone*, which carries Arthur's life up to the point of the discovery of his high parentage and his coronation as King of Gramarye. Then he went widely astray in the second novel, *The Witch in the Wood*, because stupidity and egotism are its chief themes and because he found it far more difficult to write about women than about boys and men. *The Witch in the Wood* develops the Gaelic opposition to Arthur: Morgan le Fay's sister Queen Morgause and the sons of the latter: Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, Gareth, and also Mordred (her son by Arthur, whom she briefly ensorcells after his coronation). These boys get a stultifying education at the hands of the blundering babu Sir Palomides, typus of the well-intentioned teacher who cannot handle his pupils

and becomes their butt, and a superstitious Irish hermit, St. Toirdealbhach, who tells a few fascinating tales but is generally a bit too much the worse for whiskey.

White's finest psychologizing is done perhaps on Mordred: "It is the mother's not the lover's lust that rots the mind. . . . Mordred, robbed of himself—his soul stolen, overlaid, wizened, while the mother-character lives on in triumph . . . seemingly innocent of ill-intention." Again the anima.

Queen Morgause is the chief character in the book; and White's anachronism for her is the day-dreaming, self-enthralled, capricious, yet basically authoritarian modern woman who puts all her interest into making a set at the nearest eligible man or men. In this instance they are King Pellinore and Sir Grummore Grummursum, two of the prize comedians from *The Sword in the Stone* and each lovably dense in his own way. A woman blinded by conceit wooing two such clowns might make two or three chapters of good farce, but spread over a whole book the result is deadly—one more example like *A Connecticut Yankee* of how the exposition of ignorance can damage and, in the case of *The Witch*, ruin a book.

Also, White wanted to use the second novel to demonstrate how Morgause was a witch capable of seducing Arthur by black magic—but since the only magic he allows her is a pitiful trust in cosmetics and her own (nonexistent) ability to play Queen Cleopatra one day and Annie Besant the next, he does not achieve his purpose and produces more boredom.

After this fiasco, White went on to do a good job on *The Ill-Made Knight*—the story chiefly of Lancelot and Guenever and Arthur's attempts to

enlist Might in the service of Piety and Right—but then his creativity ground to a stop because of the wrongness of the second novel.

White was almost twenty years getting out of this predicament. He did this chiefly by drastically shortening *The Witch in the Wood*, changing its title, eliminating the farce entirely, exchanging Queen Morgause's trust in cosmetics for one in the blackest and nastiest of medieval magic (the Spancel, etc.), and making her and her sons creatures nourished overmuch on resentment and hate. On the whole this time he avoided trying to get inside her mind, confessing his inability to write convincingly about certain sorts of women. The changes on the whole, however, were completely successful, and he was able to go on and finish up the tetralogy brilliantly with *A Candle in the Wind*.

Unfortunately, however, he let himself be tempted to go back and revise *The Sword in the Stone*, taking out a number of the most delightful and amusing episodes because, one fears, he thought them a bit childish—almost never a good reason for chopping down a work of art. In particular, with the idea of lending greater credence to Morgause's black magic, he completely eliminated the witch Madam Mim and completely rewrote the chapter about Morgan le Fay. In counterbalance, it must be admitted, he wrote two new fine sections—Wart's experiences as an ant, which give him insight into totalitarianism, and his longer experiences as a wild goose, a very beautiful section, which give him an understanding of the life of birds—their ability to live together in relative amity, their "parliaments," the widening of vision and understanding that comes from

flight—an understanding which becomes the basis of Arthur's final comments on life.

Yet good new material never makes up for as good or better old material eliminated. Madam Mim (B. A. [Dom-Daniel]), PIANOFORTE, NEEDLEWORK, NECROMANCY, No Hawkers, circulars, or Income Tax, Beware of the Dragon) is one of the best fictional witches ever created, and her formal wizardly duel with Merlin, in which each keeps changing himself into a beast which can destroy the other, has already had many fictional echoes, down to a similar duel in the otherwise largely banal motion picture *The Raven*. Her work song is enough to demonstrate the crime of consigning her to oblivion:

Two spoons of sherry  
Three oz. of yeast,  
Half a pound of unicorn,  
And God bless the feast.  
Shake them in a colander,  
Bang them to a chop,  
Simmer slightly, snip up nicely,  
Jump, skip, hop.

Knit one, knot one, purl two together,  
Pip one and pop one and pluck the secret  
feather.

Baste in a mod. oven.

God bless our coven.

Tra-la-la!

Three toads in a jar.

Te-he-he!

Put in the frog's knee.

Peep out of the lace curtain.

There goes the Toplady girl, she's up to no  
good that's certain.

Oh, what a lovely baby!  
How nice it would go with the gravy.  
Pinch the salt.  
Turn the malt.  
With a hey-nonny-nonny and I don't  
mean maybe.

Likewise there is no comparison between the first castle of Morgan le Fay conceived as a modern movie palace (it had neon-lights around the front door, which said in large letters: THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS, NOW SHOWING complete with food temptations of chocolate and strawberry sundaes dispensed by Negro minstrels who sing,

Way down inside the large intestine,  
Far, far away.  
That's where the ice cream cones are  
resting.  
That's where the eclairs stay.

and the second merely disgusting medieval vision of a castle built of butter, lard, and cheese, which disgusts when it is supposed to tempt.

Or consider Morgan le Fay in the properly medieval version:

She was a very beautiful lady, wearing beach pajamas and smoked glasses. One side of her yellow hair fell over the right optic of her glasses, and she was smoking a cigarette in a long green jade holder as she lay full length on a white leather sofa. All round the walls and on the grand piano there were photographs, signed "Darling Morgy from Oberon," "Best Wishes, Pendragon, R. I.,"

"From Charlie to his own Queenie," "Yours sincerely, Bath and Wells," or "Love from all at Windsor Castle."

In eliminating the latter version, White was betraying his own method of controlled anachronism.

My advice is to read the first version of *The Sword in the Stone*, then read the wild-goose and ant sections from that novel as revised, and continue through with the other three novels as revised in the omnibus version.



# THE NOVELS OF ERIC RÜCKER EDDISON

by  
JOHN BOARDMAN

ERIC RÜCKER EDDISON (1882-1945) showed in his novels the influence of three sources, all in the romantic tradition of literature. The first source, which exerts a greater influence upon *The Worm Ouroboros*<sup>1</sup> than upon the Zimiamvian novels<sup>2,3</sup>, is the Eddaic and sagaic literature of the Scandinavians. Eddison's study and translations of these great epics undoubtedly inspired his own works. The second source is the rich literary flowering of Renaissance Europe. The reader familiar with Shakespeare, Marlow, Webster, and other dramatists of the English Renaissance will recognize strong traces, and occasionally even paraphrases, of their works. The politics of the Zimiamvian novels also reminds the reader of the dynastic intrigues of this period of European history. Finally, the classical period is represented—not the sterile, Apollonian literature of later classical times, but the elements of romantic myth which appear in some of the earlier works of the classical

period, the classicism of Homer, Sappho, and Anacreon rather than that of Virgil and Ovid.

Eddison's novels take place on two levels—one of vivid action and complex intrigue, and one of equally fascinating and complex philosophy. The former element dominates in *The Worm Ouroboros*, but both are represented in the other novels.

*The Worm Ouroboros* is the tale of a great war between the lords of Demonland and King Gorice XII of Witchland. These mythical nations are located on an Eddisonian Mercury, to which the reader is introduced by the dream-voyage of an English gentleman, Edward Lessingham. The magnificent and sinister King Gorice, a great necromancer, is opposed by three brothers: Lords Juss, Goldry Bluszczo, and Spitfire of Demonland and by their scapegrace cousin, Lord Brandoch Daha. Gorice uses his sorcery to carry Goldry off to a distant mountain and imprison him there; his kinsmen must rescue him while Gorice's warriors devastate their homeland. Juss and Brandoch Daha climb the dizzying heights of Koshtra Piv-rarcha, and seek the aid of Queen Sophonisba, who dwells within the mountain Koshtra Belorn. The Queen has dwelt here in perpetual youth ever since the sack of her castle, centuries before, by Gorice IV. She tells Juss that he can ride to his brother's aid only on the back of a hippogriff, and after vainly trying a rescue on foot the Demons return to their own land to get a hippogriff egg from the bottom of a lake. In the meantime, Gorice's cruel and ruthless captain Corinius is ravaging Demonland; Brandoch Daha's sister Mevrian barely makes her escape from him. In this she is aided by the sad, grave, intelligent traitor,

Lord Gro, who is easily the romance's most engaging character. The Demon lords return, expel the Witches from Demonland, and proceed to the rescue of Goldry Bluszco. After he is restored to them through Juss's daring and courage, the Demons besiege Gorice's hold of Carcë, and in a great battle the lords of Witchland are overthrown and slain. The romance's Epilog brings the tale full circle upon itself, like the serpent of the title.

In this novel, Lessingham appears merely as a device for taking the tale to Mercury and is not heard from after the principal characters are introduced. This Mercury is not the first planet of our familiar solar system, since it possesses a moon, air, seas, and all the familiar attributes of our Earth. It is in fact not the Mercury of astronomy but the Mercury of astrology; the mutable, unpredictable planet where anything can happen.

The Zimiamvian novels begin with the death at the age of ninety of Edward Lessingham. After a moving Prolog, Lessingham reappears as a young captain in Zimiamvia, active in the political turmoil left by the death of King Mezentius. Although he is an honorable man and a clean fighter, he takes the part of his ambitious and conscienceless cousin Horius Parry, regent for the late King's daughter and heiress, Queen Antiope. This brings him into conflict with Mezentius's bastard son, Duke Barganax, a man of character equal to his own, but not as fiercely active in nature.

The Zimiamvian novels are based on a unifying philosophical view which permeates their fabric. The principal character in these romances is the "awful, gold-crowned, beautiful Aphrodite." She appears as Fiorinda, Barganax's mistress; she also

appears, less clearly, as Queen Antiope, as Barganax's mother the Duchess of Memison, and as Lessingham's long-dead wife Mary. Opposite her is her lover, Edward Lessingham, whom she permits by her favor to enter Zimiamvia after his death. His active and contemplative characters are represented by the soldier Lessingham and the Duke Barganax. The two men get an inkling of this fact during their conflict with each other and with Horius Parry. As a chorus to this rich drama stands Barganax's aged secretary, the philosopher Vandermast, with the strange train of nymphs as a light obligatto to the great theme of the Goddess and Lessingham.

*Mistress of Mistresses*<sup>2</sup> tells of Edward Lessingham's death, and of his translation to Zimiamvia amid the wars of succession. *A Fish Dinner in Memison*, though written later, takes place in Zimiamvia earlier, during the lifetime of Mezentius. Barganax's courtship of Fiorinda and Lessingham's courtship of Fiorinda and Lessingham's courtship of Lady Mary Scarnside are treated in tandem, with the two worlds joined by Fiorinda. Of all the avatars, she is the most aware of the Goddess within her.

*A Fish Dinner in Memison* incorporates more of Lessingham's life in our world than do the other Zimiamvian novels. "Our" Lessingham is a less interesting person than Zimiamvia's; lacking such thorough villains as Horius Parry or the slimy King Derxis, he is forced to do battle against Hungarian Communists and others of the rabble who fail to recognize the innate superiority of an English country gentleman. (He comes over as a sort of refined James Bond.) The chief Zimiamvian event of this book is the banquet from which it

takes it title. A question is posed to the company: "If we were gods, what manner of world would we create?" (Eddison, clearly, has already answered this question for himself.) In answer, Fiorinda/Aphrodite causes Mezentius/Zeus to create our Earth, as a stage for them to meet and love as Mary and Lessingham.

*The Mezentian Gate*, unfinished at Eddison's death, carries the narrative back still further to Mezentius's childhood and the intrigues arising from the murder of his father by an Akkaman prince. (Akkama is a nation of villains, whose chief purpose for existence seems to be the providing of wars in which the Zimiamvians show their mettle.) It is more wholly Zimiamvian than *A Fish Dinner in Memison*. The House of Parry takes a leading role, and the characters of its many headstrong, ambitious, cruel members are well drawn.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the sweeping plots, the finest point of these novels is the luxuriant prose. Descriptions of people, places, and battles are framed in language of a richness seldom encountered in writers of the twentieth century. The few flaws of Eddison's novels arise in places where this is overdone, but these are not very frequent, and cannot detract from the grandeur of the romances. More serious is the romanticizing of war, but these books are by no means the only ones which suffer from it.

Among the authors who have had to create new worlds to give full scope to their imaginations, Eddison occupies a prominent place. He provides his books with maps and chronologies, but leaves enough unsaid to interest the imaginative reader.

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# HYBORIANS, BE SEATED

## (The Fantasy of A. Merritt)

by  
RAY CAPELLA

GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED. Sir—you in the back with the double-handled sword—would you mind? Thank you. Don't glare, lady, I'm a Hyborian, too . . . By taste, if not by birth.

We're here to look at the field with less partiality, Hyborians or not. There were other storytellers, you know. And many deserve an honored place within our walls.

Writers like to eat, more often than not. Some of those in the past tinged their stories with pseudo-science to sell to magazines that were then publishing the stuff, thus giving their fantasy yarns a certain ambiguous status in the field. But if they evoked a mood more of the fantastic than s-f, and held the fire of sorcery and terror to temper the adventure, I think they should be mentioned here.

Abe Merritt, in most cases, wrote fantasy. His stories were based on a seemingly boundless knowledge of folklore, or extrapolated legend. His

s-f, if any, is and will remain questionable for a hell of a long time.

Whether or not he wrote series about his heroes is of no consequence; he belongs. And strangely enough, I've rarely heard him mentioned in Amra.

No reader of Merritt will ever forget Leif Langdon, the brooding lead figure in *The Dwellers in the Mirage*. He stands as the "Conan" of Merritt's heroes.

And Merritt had a "John Carter," too, in the protagonist of his classic *Ship of Ishtar*. Matter of fact, Kenton was considerably more real than John Carter. Burroughs had a habit of waving his characters' codes of honor like a bloody flag, until one got sick of their cardboard qualities. Merritt's people lived their principles wordlessly, so to speak. It's the same difference as you might find in two of the current movie spectacles, for instance, the unadulterated cornball flagwaving of *The Alamo* and the artful handling of a similar struggle for principles in *Spartacus*.

Merritt was a word-weaver, a painter of minute detail and description, in his effort to give his stories beauty and authenticity, but this never got in the way of his action, for his plots moved, and his battles would satisfy the most bloodthirsty Howard fan. And he had exquisite taste in the handling of his ideas. Where Burroughs and perhaps Kline might milk their formulas to the point of idiocy, Merritt treated his wholly within the confines of whatever length the ideas' development required. This usually came to a novel, or an introductory novelette followed by a novel. The Merritt fan might thirst for more of Kenton's adventures with the *Ship of Ishtar*, but



that one novel will haunt him as long as he can remember.

Who knows—Burroughs's Mars series might've been turned "classic" by fantasy aficionados, too, if the collection had been limited to three books.

Like the others, of course, Merritt had his formulas, too. His theme was the old, lost-race, ancient-gods bit. And he had a sort of stock cast of characters: Hero, Heroine, and Villainess who competed in beauty and sorcery, a behind-the-scenes Villain (or Creature), and his Powerful Priest-Tool. And the author seemed to have a fixation for a second-lead character which I found in at least three of his novels: the mighty dwarf, short but of powerful proportions, who was sometimes on the "good" side, sometimes on the "bad." All enacted their turbulent drama against an eerie setting.

And what settings they were! The deck of a fairy ship, the misty bottom of a mirage, the huge, shining caverns of the land beneath the Moon Pool! Furthermore, the characters developed such personalities within their surroundings that they always remained distinct in comparison with similar groups in other novels.

The old fantasy fan will know which of Merritt's yarns I've considered to be sword-and-sorcery from what I've said so far: *The Ship of Ishtar*, *The Conquest of the Moon Pool*, and *The Dwellers in the Mirage*. Not having read its sequel, I don't know if *Face in the Abyss* would have evolved into the same category. I do not know that for weird writing, *Face in the Abyss* introduced some of what might be the strangest of the author's imaginings.

With the latter, Merritt's style was subtly—

changed. His creatures and gods in the previously mentioned stories (the little people, the Kraken in *Dwellers*, Ishtar and the gods in *Ship*, and the terrifying Dweller in *Moon Pool*, etc.) came alive in detail and colorful mood. But in *Face in the Abyss*, the description was violently expressionistic, yet nonetheless vivid. For me it was nightmarish—yet real.

*The Metal Monster* was the only Merritt tale that bogged down. From fannish comments and criticisms, I've found this seems to be general opinion. The story moved from one tremendous descriptive step to another, as if the author were trying to pen the movements in some fantastic symphony. For some reason, the grandeur in each scene brings Sibelius's *Finlandia* to mind, though I heard this symphony long after having read the novel. In any case, so much of the tale was taken up by this that characterization and plot seemed limited to the very beginning and conclusion of the narrative.

Merritt wrote *The Metal Monster* after *Conquest of the Moon Pool*, and linked sword-and-sorcery to his attempt at horror—the character-narrator was the same. Aside from this, there was little connection between the two novels. A similar relationship came out in two of his best pieces of modern horror—*Burn, Witch, Burn* and *Creep, Shadow*. These were two of his later works, and though not in the same category of fantasy-adventure as *Ship of Ishtar*, etc., no horror story fan'll deny them a place of honor in that field.

There were more . . . the short fantasy pieces at which Merritt excelled, the suspenseful mystery novel, *Seven Footprints to Satan*. . . . But, as I'm trying to keep this for the sword-and-sorcery

reader it'll suffice to mention them in passing. I will assert, however, that I thought Satan more frightening than Rohmer's *Fu Manchu* and Howard's "Skull-Face" put together.

Aside from the latter comparison, I find Howard and Merritt on the same level. Some might say the "Lord of Fantasy" (as the old fantasy crowd used to call him) was more literary, but I'd say this was confusing skill for style. Way I see it—place a detailed, beautiful oil behind a grim, primitive statuette of equal aesthetic value and you'll have my estimation from Merritt to Howard.

Now gentlemen, please lower the spear-points as you pass through the door—those drapes were filch—uh, donated by a very rich Nemedian count. I hope the attendance will be as good next time around—there were others, you—please, sir! with the double-handled sword—would you be careful with that thing? Somebody give the other gentlemen a hand, will you—Oh, is he? Well, maybe we can get another member by the next meeting. . . .



## MUNDY'S VENDHYA

by  
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

FIFTY YEARS AGO, when pulp magazines were in flower, one of the best pulps was *Adventure Magazine*, and one of its leading authors was Talbot Mundy, creator of Tros of Samothrace. Several stories by Robert E. Howard (who must have been a faithful reader of *Adventure*) plainly show the influence of Mundy and of his colleague Harold Lamb, who was also writing voluminously for *Adventure*.

Besides the Tros stories, Avon has lately reprinted four of Mundy's serials from *Adventure*: *Jimgrim*, *Ramsden* (retitled *The Devil's Guard*), *The Nine Unknown*, and *Om* (retitled *Om: The Secret of Ahbor Valley*). These are but a sampling of at least sixteen oriental novels, which Mundy wrote 1914-33. I read many of these stories when they originally appeared in *Adventure* and have recently reread *Om*, *The Nine Unknown*, and *Ramsden*.

These novels are tales of modern adventure, often with a supernatural angle, laid in various

parts of the Orient from Egypt to India and Tibet. Mundy displays a large, overlapping cast of characters: Cottswold Ommony, Athelstan King ("of the Khyber Rifles"), James Schuyler Grim ("Jimgrim"), Ranjoor Singh, Narayan Singh, Chullunder Ghose, Princess Yasmini, and others. Some appear in one story, some in another, in various combinations. In *The Nine Unknown*, Mundy makes the mistake of bringing too many of his heroes on stage at once, so that the reader finds it hard to keep track of them.

*Ramsden (The Devil's Guard)* and *Om* deal with white men in India who penetrate Tibet in disguise, in each case to rescue a fellow-European who had disappeared there. In Tibet they encounter the agents of the White Lodge of Theosophical Mahatmas, under whose tutelage the intruders begin to acquire Enlightenment. The assumption of the existence of secret societies passing on the supernatural wisdom of ancient Atlantis—just as Mme. Blavatsky had claimed—runs through many of Mundy's oriental tales. Whether Mundy himself believed it I know not, but it does no harm to pretend provided one does not take one's pretences seriously. Howard wrote a story laid in modern India, "A Thunder of Trumpets" (completed by F. T. Torbett and published in *Weird Tales* for September 1938) based on a similar premise. In a sense, the *Vendhya* and *Stygia* of the Conan stories are prehistoric versions of Mundy's India and Egypt.

Mundy's stories are of interest from several points of view: as an influence on Howard; as a foreshadowing of later fictional trends; and as rattling good adventure tales in their own right.

*The Devil's Guard* is one of a series of stories

told by narrator Jeff Ramsden: an amiable hulk of a man who, having made his fortune, spends for the fun of it. The hero, however, is an American international spy, James Schuyler Grim—lean, reserved, and part Amerind—who leads Ramsden and other chosen companions on desperate adventures all over the Orient. Despite the praise that the narrator heaps upon him, Jimgrim is not, fictionally speaking, a very successful character. For all the skill and valor attributed to him, he is too taciturn to be interesting.

Mundy is more successful with his minor characters: Narayan Singh, a towering and genially homicidal Sikh; Chullunder Ghose, a fat, emotional, excitable, voluble Bengali babu; Benjamin, an orthodox Asian Jew who runs an import-export business in Delhi and who also appears in *Om*.

The thing to note about these Asiatics is that, first, they are stereotypes. In the fiction of the time, Sikhs were always tall and ferocious (albeit the only Sikh I ever knew personally, for all his fierce whiskers and turban, was a small, clerkly person). Ghose is a linear descendant of Kipling's Hurree Babu (in *Kim*), with much the same descriptive qualities.

Unlike many writers of the time, Mundy presented his stereotypes in a friendly spirit, without pretense of European superiority. Although he might poke a little good-natured fun at their ethnic oddities, he really liked and admired these minor Asian characters and wanted the reader to do so, too. They are not just lay figures to be propped up and knocked down to provide background for the Western hero's heroisms; they are heroic in their own right. When Benjamin's son-

in-law Mordecai perishes fleeing from Tibet's Black Magicians, Ramsden, finding himself also in a tight spot, says: "I was determined not to let that brave Jew beat me in persistence." Mundy was thus in advance of Kipling, who—despite his marvelous storytelling gift and his ability to conjure up the reality of India in vivid, convincing terms—really disliked the place and its people. (He was not the only one; for, even with the best of intentions, I doubt if any place on earth administers such a violent cultural shock to the Western visitor as does India.)

Neither did Mundy take the Kiplingesque attitude common among Western story and movie-script writers of the twenties and thirties, that the British Raj was ordained by God and that any opponent of it was ipso facto a scoundrel. Older readers may recall two movies of the thirties—"The Charge of the Light Brigade" with Errol Flynn and "The Lives of a Bengal Lancer" with Clark Gable—which presented this view.

The Indians, Mundy saw, had a case, too. In *Om*, the hero—the middle-aged British-Indian civil servant Cottswold Ommony, protagonist of another series of Mundy's tales—says: "India has a perfect right to go to hell in her own way. Surgery and hygiene are good, but I don't believe in being governed by the medical profession. Cleaning up corrupted countries is good; but to stay on after being asked to quit is bad manners. . . . Besides, we don't know much—or we'd have done much better. . . . There's a time to stand aside and let 'em grow. There's such a thing as too much nursing."

On the other hand, Mundy's fiction is dated by the fact that his heroes—Ommony, Ramsden,



Grim, and the rest—show what to a present-day reader seems like an abnormal indifference to sex. About the only allusion to the topic in the two novels in question occurs at the end of *Om*, where Ommony is thinking vaguely of asking a middle-aged maiden lady of long acquaintance to marry him. But that was how they did things in the twenties. *Weird Tales*, despite all the naked babes on the covers, was sexually pure within. And even the stories in those furtive pulps called “the hots” (*Spicy Stories*, etc.) would seem tame today. In *Adventure*, even mild profanity was tabued, so that “by God!” was printed as “by——!” These tabus have been pretty well shattered—but whether the level of entertainment has risen in proportion is questionable.

Natheless, Mundy's stories boast the considerable virtues of well-built plots, fast pace, abundant quiet humor, and clear, brisk, literate, unaffected prose. Unlike Kipling, who tended to indicate dialects by phonetic respelling to the point where he becomes almost unreadable (“ ‘Out wid ut,’ sez I, ’or I’ll lave no bone av you unbreakable.’ ”), Mundy has the sense merely to hint at a dialect from time to time.

The main faults of Mundy's stories are, first, that his leading characters are just too pure to be credible in this cynical age; and second, that—like his younger contemporary Aldous Huxley—he interrupted the action by long, moralistic lectures on the virtues of some hidden brotherhood of mystics. Events have dated stories of all-wise Tibetan Mahatmas, just as they have the lost-race story. Hence such homilies carry little conviction. One asks: what are these supermen doing now to keep the unfortunate Tibetans from being massacred

wholesale, while the survivors are force-fed the invincible thoughts of Chairman Mao?

From the limited materials available for comparison, it seems that Howard absorbed something of Mundy's attitude towards the Asians. At least, ethnocentrism is less evident in the stories of Turan and Vendhya than in those of the Black Kingdoms, where Howard's boyhood background dictated his attitudes. At least, it is less evident if we allow for the fact that most of the people whom Conan encounters are pretty scoundrelly no matter what their origin, to give the hero worthy antagonists.

The changes in fictional techniques since Mundy's *fluorit* have often gone to extremes that are just the opposite of those that obtained in his time. Instead of the omnipotent hero, we have the antihero, a wretched, cringing little twerp with neither brawn, brains, nor character, with whom we are supposed to "identify." Stories depicting the conflict of "huge ideological forces and economic interests against one another" are unbearably dull. And in trying to avoid ethnic stereotypes, writers sometimes end up using antistereotypes—in other words, standardizing on characters representing the opposite of the stereotype. After all, not every Scotsman is a spendthrift, nor every Irishman a teetotaler, nor every American Negro a virtuous and sensitive intellectual.

So Mundy, while in some ways a typical pulp writer of the twenties, in others foreshadowed the changes in popular sentiment and in fictional techniques that took place in later decades. Luckily for modern readers, he was not such a futurist as to fall into the contemporary fictional vices, and so he can still be read with pleasure.

## TITIVATED ROMANCE

by

FRITZ LEIBER

*Jurgen, A Comedy of Justice*; by James Branch Cabell, Robert McBride & Co., 1919.

If the Gray Mouser has in him a pinch of Horvendile (*The Cream of the Jest*), he also has as part of his secret litany that bold boast, "I am a monstrous clever fellow," often subvocalized by Jurgen, hero of the like-named novel, which was first shown to me either (my memory hesitates) by Harry Fischer or by a tall, slim, dark high-school girl who shall remain nameless here, though I will never forget her name.

The title of this review or commentary comes from Cabell's half-damning praise of Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*: that it is "A rather majestic example of romance,—of really pure romance, untitivated, in our modern way, with satire or allegory. . . ." Well, let us consider how the titivated variety wears after, lo, almost half a century.

*Jurgen* is the full-length play for which *The Cream of the Jest* is a curtain-raiser. It too begins in Poictesme and (after a trifle of magical time-

traveling) at Count Emmerick's castle of Bellegarde. Even Ettarre is there—Count Emmerick's child-sister, later yearned after by Horvendile: "Little Ettarre, who was this night permitted to stay up later than usual, in honor of the Masque." But Jurgen's beloved is Emmerick's somewhat older sister—her age is 17 years and 8 months, to be precise—Dorothy la Désirée, the Heart's Desire.

Jurgen is a paunchy, middle-aged pawnbroker and poet of Poictesme, who has been magically freed of his nagging wife Dame Lisa and allowed to return to a Wednesday of his youth (that was the trifle of time-traveling) when he was deeply in love with Dorothy and she with him, before he went off to seek his fortune, without having possessed Dorothy and before she quickly jilted him to marry the wealthy Heitman Michael. Now Jurgen, magically restored to youth yet with all his memories of the intervening years intact, is given a chance to handle things differently.

He does that. He picks a duel with Heitman Michael, but although he is a "very acceptable swordsman," his adversary is a better one and Jurgen's sword is "twisted from his hand, and sent flashing over the balustrade, into the public highway." He bares his chest for the death-thrust, but the victor scorns to kill such a mad stripling and instead turns away to lead the dance with Dorothy, who has been watching with interest.

Now we perceive the true heroic character of Jurgen. He realizes things are going to turn out just the way they did the first time, that once again the strong man is going to win the poet's prize; and he decides, "It was unfair."

"So Jurgen snatched out his dagger, and drove

it deep into the undefended back of Heitman Michael. Three times young Jurgen stabbed and hacked the burly soldier, just underneath the left ribs. Even in his fury Jurgen remembered to strike on the left side."

The corpse is quickly hid under a stone bench, Jurgen sits down on it with Dorothy and makes "such advances as seemed good to him" and now we get in Dorothy's dialogue a taste of the sort of stuff with which Cabell teased the censors of his day:

"Here, over a dead body! Oh, Jurgen, this is horrible! Now, Jurgen, remember that somebody may come any minute! And I thought I could trust you! Ah, and this is all the respect you have for me!"

At this point, rather to Jurgen's dismay, Dorothy is transformed into the middle-aged, lascivious wife of Heitman Michael. He, however, retains his youth and goes adventuring far and wide from Poictesme, which turns out to be only one corner in a world where many realms of romantic fantasy coexist somewhat in the fashion of the Commonwealth in John Myers Myers' *Silverlock*. Camelot-land is the first stop.

Before Guenevere's wedding with Arthur, Jurgen rescues her from the sorcerous Thragnar and they take pleasure in each other for a little while, Jurgen now calling himself Duke of Logreus. Here is another example of the titivated, or rather titillated prose of Cabell:

"What followed was pleasant enough, for now it was to the wide and softly cushioned throne of a king, no less, that Guenevere and Jurgen restored, so as to talk where they would not be bothered with interruptions. The throne of Gogyrvan was

perfectly dark, under its canopy, in the unlighted hall, and in the dark nobody can see what happens."

Jurgen's next encounter is with the charming ghost of Queen Sylvia Tereu, ninth wife of King Smoit. The king—the two ghosts sit cosily on the end of Jurgen's bed rather like Topper's ectoplasmic friends—claims to be Jurgen's grandfather by a past adultery and persuades him, since they resemble each other, to transform himself by means of a magic draught into a ghost for the night so that Jurgen can impersonate Smoit and reenact Smoit's murder of Sylvia in the White Turret, as tradition demands; Smoit needs a double because he must on the same night be haunting the scene of another of his murders.

Jurgen and Sylvia reenact the murder—the occupant of the White Turret that night is Anaïtis, the Lady of the Lake, who witnesses "the terrible scene with remarkable self-possession." Afterwards Jurgen and Sylvia rest outside the door, she revealing that her husband Smoit never understood her and Jurgen comforting her. There follows a better example of Cabell's censor-baiting, of which I quote the essentials:

Jurgen drew his sword, charmed Caliburn, and said, "As you perceive, I carry such weapons as are sufficient for all ordinary encounters."

Queen Sylvia protested, "To draw your sword against a woman is cowardly."

"The avenging sword of Jurgen, my charming Sylvia, is the terror of envious men, but it is the comfort of all pretty women."

"It is undoubtedly a very large sword," said she:

"oh, a magnificent sword, as I can perceive even in the dark. But—"

"Now your arguments irritate me, whereas—"

"There is something in what you advance—"

"There is a great deal in what I advance, I can assure you. It is the most natural and penetrating kind of logic; and I wish merely to discharge a duty—"

"But you upset me, with that big sword of yours, you make me nervous, and I cannot argue so long as you are flourishing it about. Come, now, put up your sword! Oh, what is anybody to do with you! Here is the sheath for your sword," says she.

At this point they are interrupted.

"Duke of Logreus," says the voice of Dame Anaïtis, "do you not think it would be better to retire, before such antics at the door of my bedroom give rise to a scandal?"

Unsurprisingly, Jurgen next sails away with Anaïtis to her land of Cocaigue, a country of everlasting idleness and luxury described in a jongleur's fabliau of about 1305. Cocaigue (or Cocaigue) turns out to be the homeland of many myths, particularly fertility myths. Anaïtis rules it as chief sex goddess, though forced to journey about a great deal to be present at diverse celebrations of her rites and also tempt into sin holy men able to resist her charming subordinates. Jurgen and Anaïtis are wedded in a rite described in right Cabellian fashion, which I again strip to essentials:

Duke Jurgen held the lance erect, shaking it with his right hand. This lance was large, and the

tip of it was red with blood.

Kneeling, Anaïtis touched the lance, and began to stroke it lovingly.

Then Jurgen raised Queen Anaïtis so that she sat upon the altar. She placed together the tips of her thumbs and of her fingers, so that her hands made an open triangle; and waited thus. Upon her head was a network of red coral, with branches radiating downward: her gauzy tunic had twenty-two openings, so as to admit all imaginable caresses, and was of two colors being shot with black and crimson curiously mingled: her dark eyes glittered and her breath came fast.

Jurgen said: "O thou, continuous one, whom I now adore in this fair-colored and soft woman's body, it is thou whom I honor, not any woman, in doing what seems good to me: and it is thou who art about to speak and not she."

Then Anaïtis said: "Yea, for I speak with the tongue of every woman, and I shine in the eyes of every woman, when the lance is lifted."

And now Jurgen shifted the red point of the lance, so that it rested in the open triangle made by the fingers of Anaïtis.

"I am the life and the giver of life," cried Jurgen. "Make open therefore the way of creation!"

Anaïtis cried: "There is no law in Cocaigue save, Do what seems good to you."

At this point a person may well decide that Jurgen is certainly not sword and sorcery, but perhaps lingam and illusion fiction. In this day of almost uncensored writing—about sex, at least—Cabell's tricks may seem mere literary curiosities albeit charming ones. My selections and abridgements, however, while illustrating



Cabell's techniques as a torero arousing and evading the great bull of censorship, do injustice to the book's poetry and philosophy and particularly to its fascinating flood of romantic names, its torrents of historical, mythological, and anthropological references, both real and author-invented. The book has its central theme of romantic illusion and disillusion, but it takes in more than that and reaches out for still more. Jurgen has provocative philosophic conversations with Merlin, with Pan, with Guenevere's father, with Anaitis, and perhaps particularly with one Mother Sereda, who seems at first to be the fourth Fate, an undistinguished woman who slowly takes the color out of everything, and who appears also under such anagrammatic names as Aderes and Æsred. Touches like this tempt the reader to hunt for deep, secret meanings in the book, but they are chiefly a teasing playfulness of Cabell's and perhaps one of his devices for keeping a reader imaginatively on his toes. They are very much like his trick of suppressing certain key conversations and revelations and letting us learn what we can about them from Jurgen's reactions. For instance, after an undescribed forest visit with a brown man with queer feet (presumably Pan) Jurgen comes away raging: "Why were there a bit of truth in your silly puppetry this world of time and space and consciousness would be a bubble, a bubble which contained the sun and moon and the high stars, and still was but a bubble in fermenting swill! I must go cleanse my mind of all this foulness. You would have me believe that men, that all men who have ever lived or shall live hereafter, that even I am of no importance! Why, there would be no justice in any such arrange-

ment, no justice anywhere! If lies could choke people that shaggy throat (of yours) would certainly be sore."

Just beside this speech, in my library copy of *Jurgen*, some unknown has penciled appositely, in script suitable for engraving the Lord's prayer on a cherry pit: PAN AN EXISTENTIALIST! Isn't it amazing how the mind of the intellectual sees at once through the enigma of Pan's (?) revelations to *Jurgen* and in three glowing words, both aids the faltering reader and defaces public property! This Lilliputian graffito testifies to the continuing appeal of the book, its considerable intellectual scope (resilient enough to ride with the punch of existentialism) and especially to the contagious delight of posing as a "monstrous clever fellow"!

Besides the "monstrous clever fellow" bit, there are other oft-repeated credos or apothegms in the book, such as *Jurgen's* "I am willing to taste any drink once" and his "For after all they may be right; and certainly I cannot go so far as to say that they are wrong: but still, at the same time—!" and "My wife (husband) does not understand me" (even Satan and St. Peter parrot this) and Anaïtis's "A man possesses nothing certainly save a brief loan of his body: and yet the body of man is capable of much curious pleasure."

In *Cocaigne* *Jurgen* witnesses many "curious pleasures" teasingly half described and learns of many "devices" and hobnobs with all sorts of animal-headed myths such as the Minotaur and other Grecian monsters and various gods of Egypt, and with Anaïtis, whom he sometimes refers to as "a nature myth connected with the moon," but on the whole *Jurgen* feels more at home in the Library of *Cocaigne*, perusing the *System of Worshipping*

a Girl, the Dionysiac Formulae, the Spintrian Treatises, and so on. Much as H. P. Lovecraft, Cabell doted on inventing imaginary books, chief among them such sources for the Jurgen legend itself as Angelo de Ruiz's "monumental" *Synopses of Aryan Mythology*, John Frederick Lewistam's *Key to the Popular Tales of Poictesme*, and of course *La Haulte Historie De Jurgen*. He also liked to construct quotes from them, such as this one epitomizing the book:

OF JURGEN EKE THEY MAKEN  
MENCIOUN,  
THAT OF AN OLD WYF GAT HIS YOUTH  
AGOON,  
AND GAT HIMSELFE A SHIRT AS BRIGHT AS  
FYRE  
WHEREIN TO JAPE, YET GAT NOT HIS  
DESIRE  
IN ANY COUNTRIE NE CONDICIOUN.

The "old wyf" is Mother Sereda and the shirt that of Nessus—a hint that all Jurgen's pleasures are also a torment to him.

Occasionally referring to those around him as legends and using touches of modern idiom and reference—these are about the only ways in which Jurgen breaks the spell of his own book—a great improvement on Kennaston's maunderings in *The Cream of the Jest*.

Jurgen rather swiftly tires of Cocaigne. He finds that a perpetual orgy grows wearisome, especially when supervised by sex deities who take themselves and their orgy-rules very seriously—and it may be true, as some have said, that vice is anything (such as prayers, say) repeated compulsively.

Some of Jurgen's weariness with ritual sex is quite comic, as indicated by this sample dialogue with Anaïtis:

"And your female relatives are just as annoying, with their eternal whispered enigmas, and their crescent moons, and their mystic roses that change color and require continual gardening, and their pathetic belief that I have time to fool with them. And the entire pack practices symbolism until the house is positively littered with asherahs and combs and phalloses and lingams and yonis and arghas and pulleians and talys, and I do not know what other idiotic toys that I am continually stepping on."

"Which of those minxes has been making up to you?" says Anaïtis, her eyes snapping.

Jurgen, by the by, so long as he remains youthful, is always accompanied by a tall, bent shadow. It turns out to be that of Mother Sereda, who spies on him in this fashion.

Deserving mention here too is the charming story related by Merlin about his shadow, which embraces a church steeple on a Sunday, to the discomfiture of congregation and priest, but sabbingly refuses to let go of it.

"But you must go away," the priest said, "for this is High God's house, and far-off peoples are admonished by its steadfast spire, pointing always heavenward, that the place is holy."

And the shadow answered, "But I only know that steeples are of phallic origin."

At any rate Jurgen finds his ritual liaison with Anaïtis becoming exactly like his marriage with

Dame Lisa. (Lingam and disillusion fiction?) He leaves Cocaigne without regrets—at least at the time of leaving. Perhaps, like *Candide* in the suppressed chapter about his harem delights (Did Voltaire really write that himself?) Jurgen will want to return to Cocaigne as soon as he is rested up.

During the second half of the book, the disillusionment of Jurgen continues, though with many piquant touches. He “returns to nature” and weds a hamadryad named Chloris, who expires when her tree is chopped down by the Philistines, who have just conquered Romance. He meets Horvendile and they argue jokingly as to which is the dream of the other. He encounters Helen of Troy, now wed to Achilles, discovers her to be (for him) the youthful Dorothy La Désirée, yet turns away from her because “if she were perfect in everything, how could I live any longer, who would have no more to desire?” He descends into Hell and discovers it to be his grandfather’s dream, born of a swollen conscience, where the damned rage in their flames, demanding more torments to fit the sins they are so proud of, and the poor devils sweat to please them.

There is no water in Hell, only the oceans of blood shed in the wars of religion, and Jurgen rather sympathizes with the rebelliousness of the devils while he is there. He briefly weds a vampire on vacation.

He ascends to the Heaven of his Grandmother (it turns out to be, born of her doting love for her children) and listens to the complaints of the Disciples against modern Christianity with its support of war and its Volstead Act, which forgets the wine Jesus conjured up at Cana and drank at the

Last Supper. Once again he meets Mother Sereda—her firmest personality seems to be that of Res Dea, Goddess of Things, Cybele the Earth Mother—and on this occasion his ability to control superior beings by quoting imaginary books at them is insufficient; he loses his temper with her, calls her an old hag, and for that she turns him into a paunchy pawnbroker once more. At long last he meets Koshchei, Lord of Things as They Are and creator of all gods, and finds him a somewhat overworked, colorless, stupid fellow—as Jurgen should have known, he tells himself, for “Cleverness was, of course, the most admirable of all traits: but cleverness was not at the top of things, and never had been.” He is given a last chance at the women he loved most deeply, but now, since he is no longer young, he most regrettingly rejects them all: Guenevere because he lacks faith in Romance and in the Madonna myth which makes her desirable; Anaïtis because “To pretend that what my body does or endures is of importance seems rather silly nowadays” and because “all this to-do over nameless delights and unspeakable caresses and other anonymous antics seems rather naive”; Dorothy-Helen because he feels he has failed his vision and is unworthy of her. In the end he settles for going back to Dame Lisa, who at least is a good cook, knows his foibles, and deserves a medal for having put up with him for twenty years. In a final cruel scene he buys as a pawnbroker a necklace from the thirty-eight-year-old Madame Dorothy, Heitman Michael’s wife, so she can get money to support her latest young lover. Really there is a certain disgusting defeatism in Jurgen’s willingness to

give up all "illusions" so early in life. No wonder Cabell's fiction declined, I am told, from this point on; though *The Silver Stallion*, *Figures of Earth*, and *Domnei* probably all argue against me here.

Yet this point really irks me. For instance, when Jurgen watches the ocean waves coming up the beach, he decides, "There was no sense in this continual sloshing and spanking and scrabbling and spluttering." I had the same experience while writing "The Haunted Future" and got this message, which I incorporated into the story: "When the majestic ocean starts to sound like water slopping around in the bathtub, it's time to jump in"—I interpreted the omen not as meaning to suicide but to swim. In Frank Herbert's *The Dragon in the Sea*, Captain Sparrow defines sanity as the ability to swim. Enough said.

Nevertheless there are brilliant touches and technical tricks throughout the second half of Jurgen:

His insight into our multiple selves: "I am several people."

A much-imitated formula for tickling the reader's imagination into restless activity: "Then Jurgen tricked Phobetor by an indescribable device, wherein surprising use was made of a cheese and three beetles and a gimlet, and so cheated Phobetor out of a gray magic."

An anticipation of Momism: "We who are women or priests do what we will in Philistia, and the men there obey us."

His notion, expanded from *The Cream of the Jest*, that all life is a game, or rather an infinitude of games, in which all persons, including any gods there may be, are both players and pieces.

As for Cabell's relation to other fantasy writers, *The Cream of the Jest* came out in the same year as Dunsany's *A Dreamer's Tales* (1917) and *Jurgen* two years later: any influence here—and there seems to be little—is from Dunsany to Cabell. Dunsany became somewhat disillusioned, or at least inclined toward joking, as he wrote on; Cabell from the start used the fantasy form in order to write about disillusionment. *Jurgen* may have paved the way a bit for Erskine's novels—*The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, etc. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith were probably struck by Cabell's suave sardonicism and fiendishly clever invented books; here are a few more: Gowlais' *Historia De Bella Veneris*, *Liber De Immortalitate Mentulae*, and especially "his *Epipedesis*, that most pestilential and abominable book, quem sine horrore nemo potest legere—" (which no one read without horror). It is a coincidence too, but probably only that, that both Lovecraft and Cabell make a dubiously effective use of repetition, the former to build eerie atmosphere, the latter to drive home his philosophic points—make them a sort of litany.

How judge this "Comedy of Justice"? Well, Cabell was certainly as sincere and struck as lustily as did Mencken and Nathan against American "boobism" and provincialism. As witness this moving statement in the foreword to *Jurgen* by a spokesman for Philistia:

"There was Edgar, whom I starved and hunted until I was tired of it: then I chased him up a back alley one night and knocked out those annoying brains of his. And there was Walt, whom I chivvied and battered from place to place, and made a



paralytic of him: and him, too, I labelled offensive and lewd and lascivious and indecent. Then later there was Mark, whom I frightened into disguising himself in a clown's suit, so that nobody might suspect him to be a maker of literature: indeed, I frightened him so that he hid away the greater part of what he had made until after he was dead, and I could not get at him."

Yet for all its gay colors, brave ornaments, and seasoned wisdom there is about Jurgen a sort of lazy pessimism—a too-easy futility—an overwillingness to be content with creature comforts and recollections of youth—which one finds regrettable. (Perhaps Cabell wanted to stir us not to give in as easily as Jurgen did. In this he succeeds. For me, give me sword and sorcery, not lancet and disillusionment!)

In "The Silver Key" Lovecraft tells of Randolph Carter, who wrote novels in which "ironic humor dragged down all the twilight minarets he reared. . . . They were very graceful novels, in which he urbanely laughed at the dreams he lightly sketched; but he saw that their sophistication had sapped all their life away." This could be Cabell.

But finally—and best!—there remains with one that almost inimitable bold bounciness of the youthful Jurgen who is "a monstrous clever fellow and can walk widdershins 'round all the gods and godlets!"



**THE COMPLETE  
SWORDPLAY-  
AND-SORCERY HERO**



## WEAPONS OF CHOICE, I

by  
W. H. GRIFFEY

IF THE HERO of every sword-and-cloak adventure, every sword-and-sorcery tale of derring-do goes forth to grapple with an all-powerful adversary armed with a sword in his hand, there must be some reason for it. Is the choice his own? If not, could it be his author's?

Could it be that the sword is more dramatic? Does it convey an idea of justice being meted out? Or is it given as a handicap? The hero should have a little trouble in the fight and not win too easily, shouldn't he?

From a wall of weapons our hero snatches a sword for battle when there are spear, battle-axe, war-club, and halberd to choose from. They might give him an advantage. There is a suggestion of frailty about a slender sword blade. Its use is a science, almost an art, that takes study, practice, and a degree of skill. Its choice shows a sense of fair play, a willingness to give the villain a chance, a display of bravery and courage in the closeness of infighting that such personal combat

demands. Its use excites the primitive in man since the touch of it throws him back into the cave days; days when all he had was a knife and the faith in himself and that blade to risk his life on its daring use.

All edgeware is a brother to the knife. Any sword of whatever type is but a long knife. The Amerinds called cavalrymen "long-knives" from their sabers. Arrows are but knife-tips on a stick, a spear is the knife blade on a staff (and father to the bayonet), a lance is the knife blade on a pole, an axe is the knife broadened and thickened and set on a handle. The sword is power. The fear of the sword—or at least respect for it—is deep-grained in all men.

However, in Western stories the revolver—six-gun, if you prefer—is the weapon of choice over the often more practical rifle. Here is a substitute for the sword. It's more dashing to use—no matter if it's difficult to hit the side of a barn with one. Most people can handle a rifle, but it would be unsporting for the hero to use one against the bad guys. The villain must have the advantage. Let him use the rifle; it makes the odds all the tougher against our hero.

By this rule that favorite TV program "The Rifleman" is a misnomer, in more ways than one. Don't forget the Code of the West (it seems to have been "Don't lose your hat", but we like to think it stood for a fair fight, a fighting chance, and the utmost in sportsmanship, even to the death). On this sample program, in the first place, the hero is not using a rifle. That is a carbine he has, and a big one. A .44-.40 caliber—which shoots a bullet 44/100th of an inch in diameter with 40 grains of (in

those days) black powder. Just 6/100th more and it would be a full half-inch of soft lead; .44 is just that short of .50 caliber, the size used for buffalo. That's the nasty kind when it hits flesh and bone. It made a half-inch hole going in and a hole you couldn't cover with your hand coming out.

That's unfair to villains, to begin with. With a carbine or rifle, the hero couldn't miss a target as big as a man at thirty feet. Then he cheats, with his trick gun, because every lever-action gun is made to operate with the lever loading a cartridge into the chamber when it is worked and then the trigger snapping the hammer down on it to shoot. Therefore, every bad guy knows he has another split second of time when the hero levers his carbine. The hero is only loading up (they think); he still has to trigger his weapon to fire it.

Not this "rifleman" "hero"; his "rifle" is fixed to fire when the lever works. That is a villainous trick; Lucas McCain is no hero after all. He has the upper hand all along and his villains are going up against murder. He might as well have a submachine gun against their single-action revolvers. They wouldn't have any less chance.

In a large class of stories in contemporary settings, the use of fists takes choice over several more certain ways of hand fighting. Wonder why that is? A little man, no matter how good he is with his fists, can never whip a good big man. Yet, they stand up there and slug it out. (In the movies the little hero wins over the big brute of a villain.) On the other hand, with the use of judo or karate a little man could really flip the big bad guy all over the lot; but you rarely see them doing it. There is something slyly oriental about such tricks. They

are sneaky, unfair tricks, goes popular feeling. No All-American (Anglo-Saxon?) hero would resort to them.

Somehow an English public thrills to the battering and pounding of a fist fight. It is more direct and positive and sporting to its way of thinking. A French reading public would admire fighting with the feet but the English trained-in-thinking one would consider that a dirty trick; stand up and fight like a man!

Therein may lie a secret of translations into other languages; the fight scenes slanted to the national way of thinking, along with other knowledge of customs that only go to prove a mere language student should never attempt translations.

Since weapons of choice are not the same as choice of weapons, perhaps the duel between reader and writer simmers down to a preference that includes some knowledge of the correct weapons for the time in history in which the story takes place. For a while writers were telling of Cretan "rapiers" in historical stories. Then the archaeologists dug up some ruins of ancient Crete. The weapons turned out to be nothing but long-bladed daggers and there was no fencing in their use: they were only for overhand stabbing. This sort of "rapier" was a big favorite for stories of Lost Atlantis. However, they gave the wrong impression to the reader who knew only the rapiers of the Three Musketeers. Perhaps the choice of weapons is a more important matter than some authors have thought it to be.



## WEAPONS OF CHOICE, II

by

ALBERT E. GECHTER

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF swords in the days before firearms were fully perfected was never in question. Sword-fighting very quickly became a matter of highly specialized skill, even before the introduction of scientific fencing; but the sword was also from the very first the badge or symbol of the aristocratic warrior caste, the status symbol of a real or potential hero. The spear, the bow, the dagger, the axe, and the mace might be carried by any commoner. Any commoner might have a short-sword or cutlass. But only a real fighting-man and true warrior would possess a really good and long and heavy war-sword or dueling sword. Hence, no cavalier worth his salt would use any other weapon by choice if swords were ready to hand.

'Way out west in the wild old days, fighters felt much the same way about the Bowie knife, but they soon changed to a similar fixation for the revolver when it was introduced to the regions of the frontier. Certainly a repeating rifle was more

effective at long range, and a shotgun was often more lethal, but the revolver was unexcelled for close-range single combats, always the specialty of the true hero.

Contemporary action-fiction favors settling any and all difficulties by the use of fisticuffs because this is something every man can understand and appreciate and daydream about doing for himself in a similar predicament in real life. The typical man thinks that he too is pretty good with his fists, even though he will readily admit he's no expert on wrestling, jujitsu, judo, or karate, or even la savate. But these alternative barehanded fighting techniques, although more lethal, are also more difficult, and our hypothetical ordinary guy regards them as too exotic and unusual for him to attempt.

Writers aiming for mass-audience acceptance and reader self-identification with their fictional heroes shy away from these more sophisticated fighting techniques on that account.

*The prestige of the sword and the romantic aura surrounding it (mentioned by Messrs Griffey and Gechter) are, methinks, reducible to a sordidly economic basis. During the period—roughly -1350 to 1650—when the sword was the most effective and hence the most highly valued hand weapon, it was also the most costly.*

Consider: compared to the dagger, the axe, the mace, and the spear, the sword contains the most metal—copper, bronze, iron, or steel as the case may be. This was no small consideration before the cheapening of metals in the Industrial Revolution.

Moreover, the sword posed the most acute en-

gineering problems. The smith had to make it long enough to reach the foe, massive enough so that it should not break on helmet or shield, yet light enough to handle easily and parry with, albeit parrying did not become a major element in swordplay until the decline of armor in the seventeenth century. The smith also had to give the blade an extensive treatment—cold-working with bronze and heat-tempering with iron—to enable it to hold its edge in combat.

Compare this, for instance, with the axe, whose head is compact enough so that its wielder need not fear its breaking on impact and which is heavy enough to kill even after its edge has become nicked and dulled. Hence it took the most skilled smith to turn out a good sword, while any apprentice could make a satisfactory axe.

Since the sword was the most expensive hand weapon, it was used by the richest fighters only. Hence it became associated with kings and nobles. In the Middle Ages there was even a theory that only men of noble blood ought to be allowed to use the sword and the lance, although I never heard of any medieval general's denying swords to his men-at-arms on such grounds when swords were to be had. By the usual process of association, people came to think that, because a gentleman was originally a man who could afford a sword, possession of a sword conferred on its wearer the idealized attributes of a gentleman.

As for use of the Minoan bronze sword for overhand stabbing, this idea is, I believe, based upon a single rude sketch incised in a Mycenaean medallion or similar artifact. On the other hand, Egyptian and Mycenaean art shows many warriors of various Mediterranean nations carrying

swords point up, or drawing back their elbows for a thrust or a jab (but not a stab). Moreover, examination of replicas of Cretan swords of the period from -1500 to -1000, e.g. in the University of Pennsylvania Museum, shows large, ponderous, cut-and-thrust weapons that could not have been effectively used overhand. They are "rapiers" only by contrast with the later broad, chopping, Greek short-sword, which probably evolved in response to improvements in armor.

L. Sprague de Camp

## ON WEAPONS OF CHOICE AND/OR NECESSITY

by  
JERRY E. POURNELLE

AMRA, v. II, #22 contained a discussion of why the sword is the weapon of choice for heroes. The ideas in the two pieces were intriguing and the articles interesting, but I fear that the writers may have missed a point. As a former winner of the Seafair International Fencing Tournament, and former Northwest Épée champion, I feel called upon to defend my weapon.

One of the very best reasons the sword is the weapon of choice in single combat is that the sword is the most useful and deadly weapon for that kind of fight. Far from being at a disadvantage, the competent swordsman is definitely better off if he is fighting a villain armed with spear, lance, axe, mace, morningstar, bludgeon, etc. A good man with a quarterstaff may be able to take him, but the fight is about even, even if the swordsman does not know how to lunge. If the lunge has been invented, the quarterstaff artist will lose more often than not; and good men with the quarterstaff are sort of hard to find.

The sword holds the advantage for chiefly physical reasons. As an absurd example, it is very difficult to fight outside a phalanx with a twenty-foot sarissa; you just can't get a guy to stand his distance. Similarly, as you shorten the spear, you still have the same problem, until you have so shortened it that it becomes an assagai—a sword with neither edge nor hand-guard. You can throw the assagai, but you had best not miss.

A mace is useful if you have armor and can stand a couple of licks from the other guy while you draw back for a full swing, but otherwise not. While the man with mace—or axe—takes his backswing, the swordsman steps forward and skewers either him or his arm. If he can lunge, he doesn't step forward to do it. In either event, the axe or mace man loses.

The two-handed broadsword, which was wielded like an axe, went the way of all obsolete weapons for the same reasons. It is a fine weapon if you are wearing armor which covers you from head to toe; but the darned thing is just too slow for precision work. In fact, a swordsman will choose the lightest and slenderest thing he can find (unless he is fighting a man with claymore [The author uses "claymore" in its later meaning of the single-edged, basket-hilted, single-handed Scottish broadsword. The older meaning of "claymore" was the much larger Scottish two-handed sword—L. S. de C.] or heavy saber, which are special cases) because maneuverability is far more important than weight. You do need enough weight to keep the other guy from breaking your weapon. A claymore artist—they have to be raised from childhood—can use that thing like a light saber, and is consequently very dangerous.

In parrying, the idea is not to stop the other guy's weapon, but merely to deflect it, so that you can get him while he's off guard. The weighty weapon is useful for cutting, but unfortunately it is very difficult to kill or disable a man instantly with a cut. To make even a halfway good cut you have to hit and draw the weapon, slicing into the opponent's flesh. This takes time, and won't kill immediately; and he's likely to become quite annoyed and stab you. This does bring death instant, if the thrust is accurate. You also refrain from drawing back for a full swing if the other guy is any good, because while you wind up, he thrusts.

From the Greek times on, the sword has always been the best battlefield weapon infantry could have, right up until missile weapons could be produced in large quantities; and even then, the sword survived for a long time after for close quarters work. (After the discharge of a volley, the Scots at Killiecrankie threw away their muskets and beat hell out of the English with claymores.) Armored men with full protection could and did use either the axe or something very close to it like the broadsword, but that is a function of the armor; lightly armored and unarmored men stuck with swords. Greek infantry fought in phalanx formation and could dispense with the sword because of the array of pikes they presented; but an opponent could—and the Romans did—duck under the points of the pikes and emerge with sword going like a sewing machine. A few times like this, and the phalanx fell to the sword-armed legionaries.

The Roman legions pretty well dispensed with the pilum as a thrusting weapon, preferring to

rely on the gladius alone after the pila or javelins were hurled; even when they did use the pilum, it was in connection with swordsmen, and again it was for ordered rank fighting, not single combat.

After the decline of the legions, heavy cavalry set in, and the best weapons were the lance and bow; but there has never been an infantry before gunpowder that did not eventually have to rely on the sword if they fought in any manner other than close order; and close order fighting forces have often fallen to the swordsmen. As another example, the Spanish sword-and-buckler boys tore hell out of the Swiss pikemen after the Swiss had stood up to heavy cavalry. Their pikes and halberds were great against horses, but not against sword-armed infantry.

Another famous swordless infantry which did use an open order were the Franks, with their great axes, the Franciscae; but the Roman legions beat them, and when they made their record later, they did so by throwing the blamed things, then pouring into the holes thus created with daggers.

Now, if you are up against multiple enemies, the best practical weapon does vary according to whether or not you are alone, how well trained your friends are, and what weapons your enemies have; but for all around usefulness, you still can't beat the sword unless you travel with a company of good phalanx men—and they'd better be good. If they aren't, trade those pikes in on swords, and try to get a buckler from somewhere.

It may be dashing and daring in appearance, but for the trained swordsman, there is another reason why he chooses his favorite weapons to dispatch the ungodly—it's the deadliest thing he can pick up.



# **SON OF WEAPONS OF CHOICE AND/OR NECESSITY**

by  
**JERRY E. POURNELLE**

THE TROUBLE WITH debating about nonmissile weapons is that the problem is not at all consistent. In order to determine which weapon one needs to dispatch the ungodly, it is really necessary to know a number of items, such as: How many ungodly, and how many friends can you count on? What are the ungodly using for weapons, and how good are they with them? Can you lunge, or has this not yet been invented? Are we fighting on foot or horseback? What kind of terrain is this fight to take place on, and is it a fight or a battle?

All these questions are relevant. It is a far different thing to talk about the equipment for an army, for example, as opposed to the personal choice of weapons for a Hero who is likely to encounter other individuals only. Also, how well prepared is the Hero to be? Can he get ready for

the fight, taking considerable time to don armor and arm himself cap-a-pie, or must he fight with just what he happened to be carrying with him to the Royal Ball? Again, each condition produces a different answer.

Now for just ordinary wandering about, without being all loaded down with armor and such, I would contend that a weapon "somewhat lighter than a broadsword but definitely heavier than a fencing foil" is precisely what is needed. So long as the opponent is not likely to be wearing armor, the competent swordsman is in top shape.

The tactics to use against the sword-and-shield-man or the sword-and-buckler-man have, by the way, been subjected to field tests with the swordsman, unshielded or unbuckled, definitely winning. In the days of Cellini, men often carried one or more (yes, sometimes several) rapiers, and a small circular shield called a buckler. When swaggering down the street, these hardies used to rattle the swords against the buckler to let everyone know they were spoiling for a fight—hence the term "swashbuckler." But this didn't last. A couple of fencing masters (Italian, probably, and bourgeois certainly, the bourgeoisie didn't have armor, and had to learn to use the sword properly) developed the lunge perhaps as early as 1500 A.D., but it was a closely guarded secret. Prior to that the "pass," a walking step, was used. At all events, the ability to maneuver and to carry the sword in advance of the body instead of behind it proved decisive over the buckler boys. In order to attack, the shieldsman has to open up and present his unprotected right side to his opponent. This makes the shield irrelevant to his defense at the same time that it

hampers his attack. (Note well that for fighting in ranks with good men and true to either side of you, the situation changes. For that matter, when fighting in ranks, one is likely to want to carry the great oval shield of the legion, but it isn't very good for single combat for obvious reasons.) The shieldsman cannot lunge (or if he does, the shield becomes irrelevant again), and he must expose his arm when attacking. That arm is vulnerable to the man who *can* lunge. At close quarters, or in a crowd, the shieldsman has the advantage; but in open, single combat, it just doesn't help that much.

Now on the other hand, there's the chap with the "breastplate and usual accessories." This is a different story. First, however, let's get straight what it is Our Hero is facing. If it is merely a cuirass (which is designed just to protect against missiles and pikes), the skill of the contestants is the major factor; both will use the same tactics, and the armored man has a somewhat smaller target open. The armored man has an edge on that, but it isn't all that big an edge. The extremities are still the most vulnerable items, and the cuirass doesn't protect the neck or the armpit. Suppose, however, that the ungodly wears a hauberk and byrnie—a mail shirt and hood, with long mail skirt. Now Our Hero has troubles. His light sword is not likely to penetrate, and the other guy is probably carrying a broadsword anyway so that glittering net of defense woven by Our Hero's sword is simply swept aside or cut through. The well-armored man doesn't have to worry about being skewered while taking a backswing. Under the circumstances, the conclusion is inevitable: let the feet help the body. Our Hero now needs

some different equipment (e.g. track shoes).

This, apparently, establishes the armored man as supreme and superior, and the conclusion seems inescapable. However, things are not as simple as all that. It is true that for single combat, mounted or dismounted, the armored man (mail or plate; but plate was developed mostly in response to missile weapons) is well-nigh invincible. Historically, he dominated the scene for the entire period from Adrianople to Mortgarten, which is the better part of a millennium. What, then, happened to him?

Well, for one thing, missile weapons happened to him. Light armed cavalry stand some chance of getting in amongst the archers and gunners, due to their speed. Heavy armed cavalry just don't make it. However, it was not gunpowder or even the longbow which dropped the armored knight from his place of supremacy. These would, undoubtedly, have done the job, given time. As it happened, something else had already toppled him from his perch: the rediscovery by the Swiss of disciplined infantry.

Mortgarten in 1315 A.D., the men of Uri, Schwyz, and Appenzell cut down the chivalry of the Hapsburgs by standing fast with pike and halberd against the charge of cavalry. This required no little courage, because up to that time nothing had ever been known to resist the armored knights, according to legend. (Actually this is not true, but few knew of the exceptions.) After that, the Swiss tended to dominate the battlefields of Europe. They had some disastrous experiments with the halberdiers; and after Arbedo, when the Milanese gendarmes stormed through the halberdiers to close quarters with the

pikemen, winning the day, the Swiss put a forest of pikes in the front rank, with the halberdiers reserved for the melee that followed. The Swiss wore no armor from choice, although originally they were too poor to buy any. They did wear a cuirass for protection from arrows, and a steel cap.

With a skirmish line of crossbowmen ahead of them, the Swiss Confederates would advance in close-order formation. The 18-foot pike was held at shoulder height, and the press from the rear ranks drove the forward ranks against the enemy with irresistible force. The Swiss were invincible for almost 200 years. With the exception of the German *Landsknechte*, who used precisely the same weapons and tactics as the Confederates, no one really stood against them from 1315 to 1503 A.D. Then they faced an enemy far more dangerous: the Spanish infantry of Gonsalvo de Cordova, at Barletta. These men were armed with short-sword, buckler, steel cap, breast and backplates, and greaves. They fought in open order, used their shields to gain entrance to close quarters with the Swiss, and proceeded to lay about them with great slaughter. The sword is superior to the pike. This was once proved in a scientific test. Chaka, a king of the Zulus before Cetawayo, set 100 men with long spear and shield against 100 with assegai and shield; not a one of the spearmen survived, although this had been the weapon of the tribe and they were skilled in it. The Zulus converted to assegai at once.

However, we are now in a curious circle. At Adrianople, and other places, it was proved that armored cavalry were more than a match for sword and buckler men. At Granson, it was proved that heavy cavalry could not stand against

the phalanx either on the offensive or the defensive; and at Barletta (in the year 1503) as at Pydna (in the year 168 B.C.) it was proved that the phalanx cannot stand against the legion. (Note well that in two of the cases both armies were in the prime of organization and fitness. It is true that the infantry destroyed at Adrianople was not the Legion in its prime, but from then on until Mortgarten the mailed knights rode down infantrymen of all descriptions.)

All this, however, is applicable only to battles. We have not settled the question of individual combat. Our Hero has just been faced by a man with byrnie and hauberk. What does he need?

Well, the halberd or bill would be useful. If the ungodly is any great shakes with his sword, Our Hero is likely to lose; but at least he has a chance. That armor and broadsword don't make for any real quick offense. Note, however, that Our Hero is now a sitting duck for the first guy with a real sword who comes along. Also, halberds are not too easy to come by, and are damned inconvenient to carry around with you in polite company.

If there's a conclusion to be drawn from all this, it is that if we exclude the possibility of good missile weapons, a mail shirt and a heavy sword—even a broadsword—are near optimum. The weight of sword will depend again on the kind of enemy you fight, as against the morningstar or battle-axe man (unarmored) the lighter weapon is to be preferred.

For general, all-around use, though, when you are not going about in iron drawers, the sword that is lighter than a broadsword but definitely heavier than a rapier is *still* the best all-around weapon for dispatching the ungodly; but if you

have a friend who habitually carries a halberd to help you out against the mailed knight, this does tend to help.

Re "Son of Weapons of Choice and/or Necessity": One can, too, lunge while covering one's torso with a buckler. Try it with a garbage-pail lid. True, the lunge would have to be a teensy bit slower, because of the weight of the shield and because the lungers could not fling his left arm backwards. But the difference would be small. Moreover, the shieldsman doesn't expose his sword arm in lunging any more than the swordsman does. In any case he can protect the arm by a rapier cup hilt, or a sleeve of light mail, or both.

I should explain the disappearance of the buckler a little differently. Before 1600, the ordinary sword had a long cut-and-thrust blade, too heavy to parry effectively with. Therefore the swordsman, if not encased in armor, needed a separate defense in his left hand: a buckler, a main-gauche dagger, a rolled-up cloak, or an iron gauntlet. With the lightening of the sword in the seventeenth century, he could parry effectively with the blade alone.

Further, before about 1500, most European swords had simple cross hilts, which gave the sword hand little protection. Afterwards, the more elaborate hilts made it possible to parry with the guard of the hilt. At last came the cup-hilted rapier of the early seventeenth century, which might be called a sword with a small buckler in front of the hilt.

As for arming our lone adventurer: In pre-gunpowder days, a man's size and strength counted for more than they do now, because a man could bear a weight of armor in proportion to

his size. This meant that the armor was thicker as well as larger in area. Assuming that our hero is a big, strong man, we'll give him, let's say, a suit of half or three-quarters armor of about 1625. A well-made suit of plate is easier to get around in than the equivalent in chain mail and doesn't need such thick padding underneath to keep bones from breaking. The padding becomes intolerable in a hot climate. But whatever our hero's armor, we face the fact that the better the protection, the more burdensome the suit will be to wear and the longer it will take to do on and off. Perhaps he should have a light vest of chain for everyday wear and a suit of plate for planned combat.

Our hero should have a fairly light broadsword, as proposed by Dr. Pournelle, for fighting unarmored men. This was the kind of "hanger" the ordinary man carried in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was more all-around useful than the dainty little needlelike small sword or court sword of the eighteenth century, carried partly as a gentleman's badge of caste and partly to fight duels with other gentlemen. Cavalry of the eighteenth century used a big cut-and-thrust sword down to about 1750; then the curved Hungarian saber ousted it.

For armored foes, we also provide our hero with a heavy heavy weapon—a two-handed sword, an axe, or the like—and perhaps a shield. But he hangs these things on the saddle of his trusty steed so as not to wear himself out carrying them.

On the other hand, if he is a shrimp, he had better stick to a missile weapon, such as a crossbow, and leave the handplay to those better fitted to their gods for such work.

L. Sprague de Camp



# **RANGE**

by

## **L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP**

FORSOOTH, MANY HAVE written beguiling tales of swordplay laid on Mars, not to mention Venus and assorted extrasolar planets. The trouble with most of these stories is that the authors try to combine two incompatible elements. For one, they want the glamour of antiquity. Therefore they fill their imaginary worlds with impenetrable jungles, fearsome monsters, glittering palaces, haughty emperors, beautiful princesses, sinister temples, villainous priests, cowering slaves, deadly duels, gladiatorial combats, ghastly ghosts, frightful demons, lethal magic, gallant steeds, and of course a lavish assortment of swords and other hand-to-hand weapons.

But at the same time, the writers want to cash in on the fictional appeal of superscience. So, along with this display of picturesque archaism, they mingle elements from the technological present and future: guns, disintegrators and other lethal ray projectors, mechanical air and ground vehicles, and other scientific gadgets. At this point,

pop goes the illusion they have striven so hard to build up. For, their fictional milieu is as anachronistic, or technologically incongruous, as it would be to have a contemporary American businessman wear Gothic armor to his office or light his cigarette by rubbing sticks.

True, such incongruities do exist in the real world. Today you can see a Peruvian Indian jogging along on his mule and holding a transistor radio to his ear. A famous photograph of Sitting Bull shows the former Sioux chief driving an early automobile and wearing a silk top hat. But a mixture of the technics of different eras is always an unstable and rapidly changing state, because people compelled to mix with those of a technically more advanced culture soon adopt the gadgets of the others, as far as they can do so without much disturbing their basic cultural attitudes, social organizations, and traditional way of life. Even when these things are disturbed, the people may eventually adopt the new discoveries when they get used to them.

To judge by the record of our own species, most people are not conservative about adopting more effective methods of killing their foes and getting from place to place. In recent centuries, for instance, primitive peoples who found themselves fighting Westerners did their damndest to obtain Western weapons. In the wars of the Peruvian Indians against the Conquistadores, many Indian chiefs went into battle wearing armor looted from dead Spaniards. Once the primitives had enough guns, they quickly shelved their bows and spears. The Plains Indians made little use of either in their wars with the whites in the 1870s and 1880s.

By and large, the weapon with the longest effec-

tive range drives out the others, as the bow superseded the javelin, and the gun supplanted the bow. True, in civilized nations, the gun took several centuries to drive out the sword. The reason is that early guns took so long to reload that, if the gunner missed his first shot, his enemy could be upon him with a hand weapon before he could fire another. Therefore the gun's longer range was not always effective, and a reserve weapon was desirable.

This situation began to change with the development of the flintlock in the late seventeenth century. Now, instead of several minutes, it took a well-drilled soldier only fifteen seconds to load and fire. The development of the breech-loader with a metallic cartridge case in the 1850s shrank the interval between shots down to about five seconds, and the repeating rifle of the 1860s shortened it to less than two seconds. With each advance, the massed infantry charge became more costly. Pickett's charge at Gettysburg showed what happened to troops who tried it.

(Naval warfare underwent a parallel development. Following the U.S. Civil War and the Austro-Italian battle of Lissa in 1866, in which ramming played a large part, warships were built with ram bows projecting forward under water. But in the late nineteenth century, the armor-piercing shell made ramming generally impractical—albeit there were a few cases of ramming in the Kaiserian War. The celebrated H.M.S. *Dreadnought* sank a German submarine thus. In the Hitlerian War, aircraft did to the big gun what the latter had done to the ram. If a battleship of the time could get close enough to an aircraft carrier, it could make scrap of it in no time, as the

Scharnhorst and Gneisenau did to H.M.S. *Glorious* on 8 June, 1940. The trouble, however, was that the airplanes had usually decided the outcome of the battle before the big guns came within range. At Midway, the Japanese had sizable battleship forces at sea, but the battle was over long before they could get within shooting distance. Hence, in this war, nearly all the battleship action was at night or in particularly foul weather, when the aircraft were of little use.)

This was pretty much the end of the sword as a practical weapon. In the 1850s and 1860s an explorer, setting out for inner Africa, often carried a sword as a back-up weapon. Richard F. Burton found his sword useful in his wild nighttime fight with a whole tribe of Somalis in 1854.

By the end of the century, however, the sword had become an absurd anachronism, even though there were still a few cavalry charges. The last I know of was on 20 March, 1942, when Sandeman's cavalry detachment charged a Japanese position near Toungoo, Burma. Needless to say, Sandeman and his gallant Sikhs were all killed before they could get within slashing distance.

The American soldiers fighting the Plains Indians abandoned their sabers, since they so seldom got close enough to their foes to use them—although Custer's men, before they were wiped out, had occasion to wish that they had brought theirs along. Of the 320,000 American casualties in the Kaiserian War, two were saber wounds. Cossacks and Japanese officers might continue to carry swords down through the Hitlerian War, but such pious archaisms had as much to do with serious fighting as a modern British knighthood has to do with medieval chivalry.

My point is that people who have weapons like the radar-sighted, aluminum-alloy, radium rifles of Burroughs's Martians, with ranges of hundreds of miles, would not fool around with swords and spears, as Burroughs's people do, any more than the Plains Indians did when they got rifles. Nor will they go galumphing around on thoats, gawrs, drals, or other beasts of burden when the equivalents of automobiles and airplanes are available. Remember how quickly the Plains Indians adopted the horse.

Of course, one might find oneself in a fix where the more archaic weapon would be the more effective. In World War II, a marine friend of mine in the Pacific theater killed one enemy with a dagger and another with a machete, which is a sword of sorts. But one cannot carry enough gear to meet every possible contingency; and, 99 times out of 100, a modern repeating firearm will beat any ancient panoply that could be brought against it.

Furthermore, if your hero lives in a pre-gunpowder world where hand-to-hand weapons prevail, and he expects to have to do some serious fighting, he will try to provide himself not only with a sword but also with the best defenses that he can afford and that the armor-makers of the time can produce. This may range from an oxhide shield of the Zulu type, or a jacket to which scales of boiled leather have been sewn, up to the marvelous suits of steel plate of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which represent the all-time culmination of armor.

The precise details of our hero's defense depend partly on the technology of his world and partly on the circumstances under which he expects to fight. These factors determine whether or not he

carries a shield; whether his armor is of leather, wood, coconut fiber, cloth, copper, bronze, iron, steel, or even a steel alloy; and whether it takes the form of scale mail, ring mail, chain mail, strap armor, or plate. Does he give battle on land or sea, alone or in an army, afoot or on horseback? If he expects to fight mounted, he must consider how much weight his mount can carry. In classical Greece the heaviest-armored men were foot soldiers, because the small horses of that era could not bear a man in full armor. By the Middle Ages, the development of larger breeds of horse reversed this relationship.

In any case, be sure that a hero in his right mind, knowing he faces hand-to-hand combat, will not go into action stripped to a loincloth like a Burroughs Martian. Not, that is, if he can jolly well help it!

So, if you really want to build a convincing fantasy world, make up your mind what technological level your world shall have. If it is the ancient, preindustrial world, that's fine; if the contemporary world, that's fine; if a world of superscience, that's fine. But don't mix them, unless the older technology is shown crumbling before the new, as it always has, or unless the older activity is preserved in the form of sport. Many modern sports—hunting, fishing, sailing a sailboat, riding a horse, fighting with swords, shooting a bow, or throwing a javelin—were once serious occupations, on which a man's life might depend. But for serious adventuring—well, even Tarzan's son had the sense to hang on to his rifle and ammunition on his way to rescue his noble parents from the sinister prehensile-tailed priests of the mysterious valley of Pal-ul-don.

# **SUBLIMATED BLOODTHIRSTINESS**

by

**POUL ANDERSON**

I HAVE NO argument with Sprague's interesting essay, but might amplify his remarks a trifle.

First, he modestly omits one legitimate way in which you can put your superscientific hero in a sword-swinging type of situation. That's when, because of a shipwreck, secrecy, technological blockade, or whatever, said hero has to get out and mingle with the backward natives (oops, I mean underdeveloped patriots!) on their own terms à la Krishna.

Second, while the sword is obsolete, the knife is not. Quite apart from street fighting, it still finds use in military operations, e.g. certain commando work during the last official war. (And a bayonet, after all, is a knife or the head of a pike.) I find it hard to imagine anything more efficient for such specialized purposes. Besides, a good knife is probably the best all-around tool ever invented, and I regularly travel with mine for no other pur-

pose. So presumably Captain Future will pack a shiv along with his proton pistols.\*

Third, and a little beside the point, in a milieu where gunpowder and the modern form of industry have not been invented, what else might be? For instance, anyone could have hit on the switchblade as soon as reasonably good spring steel was available. Or the Amazonian blowgun, coupled with the merciless discipline of the English first (in our world) as archers and then as musketeers, might have wreaked the same slaughter on the French. Or there are hypothetical inventions, like the hand-cranked, dart-throwing equivalent of a machine gun which de Camp and Miller wrote about and I later borrowed with due credit. I also came up with a repeating crossbow, and discovered afterward that somebody really did make one once. Surely this is a wide-open field for our sublimated bloodthirstiness to roam in.

*\* Poul is perfectly right, of course. As I said, even in the age of guns, occasions for use of hand-to-hand weapons arise. But a rifleman can't also load himself down with a sword or a lance because of their weight and awkwardness; swords have a way of getting between one's legs and tripping one up. A knife, however, is small and light enough so that bearing it in addition to one's gun and ammo is no burden. In fact I've carried one myself in exotic surroundings. I never had occasion to use it, luckily for me, who am no trained shiv man. But it was a comfort.*

L. Sprague de Camp



**... AND AS FOR  
THE ADMIXTURE  
OF CULTURES ON  
IMAGINARY WORLDS**  
by  
**LEIGH BRACKETT**

AND FORSOOTH, BEING one of those aforementioned writers of "beguiling tales of swordplay laid on Mars," I would fain present a comment or two on the comments of my good and valued friend, Mr. L. Sprague de Camp, who swashes a mighty mean buckle himself upon divers and sundry planets.

In his article, "Range," Mr. de Camp urges that in the concoction of an imaginary world the writer should be careful not to mix incompatible technological elements—i.e., swords and spaceships.

I would agree with him completely, except for one word, which is basic to the whole argument. That word is *world*. If he had said *culture*, there could be very small argument. But we have a glib habit in this fantasy business of referring to other worlds as we refer to other countries. "Mars," we

say, "is so-and-such," exactly as we would say, "Britain is highly industrialized." Britain is an homogeneous unit, more or less, having more or less the same cultural level in all its parts. But to say "Britain" is not to say "Earth."

We perfectly accept the fact that spacecraft take off from Cape Kennedy practically over the heads of Jivaro Indians who live just a step away in distance and some ten thousand years away in time. We do not find it impossible to believe that two such cultures can exist side by side on the same planet. This was most strikingly illustrated in *The Sky Above, The Mud Below*, when the French explorers in New Guinea, surrounded by naked Stone Age men with wooden spears, looked at the photographs of the moon sent back by the Russian Lunik.

A world, a planet, is a large place and not at all homogeneous in its populations, culture levels, and technologies, any more than it is in climate and terrain. It is possible, of course, to imagine one that is socially homogeneous, and perhaps this one of ours will be some day in the future. But it is not now, and never has been, and therefore it does not seem rash to assume that other planets might be in much the same case.

So, it seems to me, the important thing is not whether we have both swords and spaceships on our imaginary world, but who uses which—and above all, who manufactures which.

I will not be responsible for any worlds but my own, and with them I am stuck, for better or for worse. But I have always tried to keep separate the elements of alien (Terran) technology, brought in from the outside, and the elements of Martian technology and culture. The Earthmen have

spaceships. The Martians do not. The Earthmen have powered vehicles for local transportation, and modern weaponry. Those Martians associated with Earthmen in the Trade Cities and City States, where the two cultures overlap, have and make use of these things. Those Martians in areas remote from these centers do not. The same applies to Venus, with this difference: Venus is a young world, with the dominant native cultures (not *all*, note, but the dominant ones) pegged at about the equivalent of our European tenth to twelfth centuries, while Mars is so ancient as to have declined from very high peaks of technological achievement to an impoverished semibarbarism, a condition brought on by the exhaustion of mineral reserves and power sources. As a planetary unit, Mars is all used up. Metals and other elements of an advanced technology must be imported from other worlds and are therefore costly and in short supply. Ergo, the more remote native populations must make out with what they have—swords, spears, and the beast of burden.

Let us consider first that question of transportation. Mr. de Camp says that people "will not long go galumphing around on thoats, zorats," etcetera, when the equivalents of automobiles and airplanes are available. And he adds, "Remember how quickly the Plains Indians adopted the horse."

They did indeed. They were a nomadic people, footbound in the vast open areas of the West, depending on migrating game herds for their livelihood, and possessed of one totally inadequate beast of burden: the dog. The horse transformed them from poverty-stricken foot-crawlers to the lords of the prairies, and transition was an easy

one. They called the horses "big dogs" and cut longer poles for the travois, learned the art of riding from the Kiowa-Comanche, who had learned it from the Spaniards, and off they went, able to chase the buffalo on even terms and to transport vastly larger quantities of personal belongings, as well as the sick, wounded, and aged persons they had formerly been forced to abandon. The "bit dog" was the perfect answer to a pressing need.

On the other hand, the town-building forest-dwelling Indian of the east, though vastly more civilized than his western cousins, and having a long and close association with European culture which could have supplied him with the horse plus a variety of wheeled vehicles, left them both severely alone. In the deep woods a horse was an impediment and a wagon an impossibility. Shank's mare on the Iroquois Trail and the birch-bark canoe on the river continued to be more efficient for his needs than the more advanced transportation of the whites.

People generally adopt the elements of more advanced technologies on the twofold basis of (a) Can I get it? and (b) Can I use it? Economics and/or the question of supply settle the first. Individual conditions settle the second. The vast country of India is served by jet planes, luxury liners, steam trains, and a quantity of automotive vehicles. The average villager continues to use his bullock cart. An automobile, or a plane, might get him from Point A to Point B more quickly, but he isn't going very far, and he isn't in a hurry anyway. The auto or plane is a single-function item, whereas his bullock, in addition to transporting him and his goods, will plough his small field, operate his

well-sweep, thresh his grain, and supply him with a useful byproduct for fuel and building material.

The modern rancher still finds the horse indispensable for the job of working cattle. The llama, the yak, the donkey, the camel, and the dogsled still perform with maximum efficiency under conditions where the auto and the plane are useless. Furthermore, these animals are fully within the grasp and comprehension of the people who use them. Consider the Plains Indian and his new acquisition, the "big dog." The critter found its own fuel, manufactured its own replacements, and could go anywhere the buffalo went. It did not require steel mills, stamping plants, the U.A.W., oil wells, refineries, service stations, garage mechanics, road and bridge engineers, maintenance crews, landing fields, qualified pilots, and ground personnel. If the Spaniards had imported Fords or Cessnas instead of horses, the story might have been quite different.

So, if I were a Martian Drylander, a nomad in a sparsely populated, remote waste of sand, rock, and dust storms, I would cling like a brother to my thoat, zorat, etcetera, which is a natural part of my environment and more efficient for my needs than sand-cats and flying machines. Even if I could afford one, along with the mob of foreign technicians required to keep the thing running.

Now, getting to the question of weaponry, and those blasted radium rifles of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom; I rather imagine that ERB regretted those rifles later on, but he was stuck with them. However, he did make their nonuse a point of honor; if not entirely convincing, it is at least arguable. The Plains Indian had efficient long-

range weapons, but efficiency was not his prime consideration. A woman could kill from afar, but it took a brave warrior to count the highest coup—touching a living enemy. Not killing, just touching. And I imagine that if someone had given Lancelot a rifle with which to pot other knights, safely from afar, he would have fainted with shock at the idea. (Mordred, of course, might have loved it.) But perhaps more than a question of honor, it was a question of what ERB's Martians wanted out of their weapons. They didn't seem to be fighting *for* anything in particular, but just for the joy of the fighting; they seemed to love hand-to-hand combat for its own sake, and so clung to the weapons that most suited their purpose. The radium rifle would have produced overkill and spoiled the fun. We also have weapons of such horrendous efficiency that we prefer not to use them; and the modern combat soldier still carries with him a species of sword, called a bayonet, for close work.

However, that's as it may be. And by and large it is true, as Mr. de Camp says, that the more advanced weapon will be adopted over the traditional one. But the adoption by a primitive culture of an article produced by a technologically advanced culture does not mean that the primitive technology is then advanced to match that of the donor group. The tribal African is no closer to providing a modern firearm for himself than was the Plains Indian. Therefore, while it would be anachronistic for American GI's to carry spear and shield into battle, it is not at all anachronistic to find the Congolese rebels using a mixture of modern weaponry supplied from the outside, and the bow and poisoned arrow, spear, club, and what

have you, to fill the wide gaps in supply.

Again to quote Mr. de Camp: "... if your hero lives on a pre-gunpowder world..." Well, we live today in a hydrogen warhead world, a gunpowder world, a bow-and-poisoned-arrow world, a blowgun-and-dart world, and a sharp-stick-with-the-point-hardened-in-the-fire world. Take your pick. Here again is that crucial matter of using "world" for "culture"—as when he says that the details of our hero's defense depend partly on the *technology of his world*, and that a hero in his right mind will not go into battle stripped to a loin cloth but will have the latest in armor and equipment that his world can provide. Okay. Now suppose I am a Shawnee warrior in pre-Columbian America. Where and how do I avail myself of the splendid armor and weapons being made in Europe? I don't even know they exist, and so go quite happily into battle stripped to my clout and moccasins. As did the post-Columbian Indian, despite those random bits of armor acquired from the invaders. The point is this: if the hero's culture provides these things, certainly he will use them. If it does not, and he has no way of procuring them from outside, he will not. But culture, please, is not world! There was Rome, and there were the barbarians. On one hemisphere, among a population all of the same rootstock, there were the Eskimo, the Cherokee, the Dacotah, the Digger, the Maya, Aztec, and Peruvian, the Jivaro, and the people of Tierra del Fuego. Today there is industrial, atomic-age Western culture, and there is the Stone Age culture of New Guinea where an airplane means only the basis of a new religion. So I would rephrase Mr. de Camp's admonition in this wise:

Any planet may have upon its surface many different levels of technology, and many degrees of the commingling thereof. But make up your mind what the pattern is and remain consistent with it. Above all, do not have persons belonging to any given culture manufacturing things that are patently beyond their technology. Barbarians-cum m-spaceships are ridiculous if it is said that the barbarians make and fly the ships themselves, but not if barbarians and spaceships belong to two different technologies; always bearing in mind that the nakedest Bushman of the Kalahari is perfectly capable of riding in a jet plane. In short—swords and spaceships on one world, but never in one culture.

Kaor!



**RANGING  
AFTERTHOUGHTS**  
by  
**L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP**

TO ROUND OUT this discussion: Regarding Krishna, I said such a mixture of technologies would be an unstable and rapidly changing condition. In the Krishna stories I made this plain, showing the technological blockade breaking down and the Krishnans in the act of developing rocket-powered gliders, paddle-wheel steamboats, steam-powered armored cars, simple cameras, and arquebuses, in imitation of the more advanced gadgets they had seen Earthmen use.

Correction: I think the Plains Indians were mainly farmers before they got the horse. After the Big Dogs came, they shifted to a more carnivorous diet because it was easier to get the meat and, with the tribe always moving around, harder to grow the vegetables.

As for primitives and motor vehicles: If a preindustrial man, whether a Solomon Islander or Martian Drylander, can neither make his automobile nor afford to buy one from those who do, he will of course have to do without. But then the automobile isn't "available" to him.

In practice, a surprising lot of them manage to scrape up enough cowrie shells or whatever is needed to buy vehicles of some sort, even if they are only the bicycles that swarm the roads of Africa today. A few years ago, while driving in the northern Sudan, every now and then I passed a truck, which some Sudani had bought on tick and then, trying to run it without proper lubrication and maintenance, had let get out of order. The truck stood by the road with the owner sprawled under it in the sand, fiddling with tools, while around him his passengers, looking like ghosts in their white turbans and jallabiyyas, stood waiting for what Allah should provide.

On the other hand, such people can learn maintenance too. Young Nasr, who drove me to Qurna near Luxor, had a thirty-year-old five-passenger touring car of some European make, which looked as if it were in mint condition: shiny paint, quiet motor, and everything. This car must have been the sole support of an Egyptian family for a whole generation, and they weren't taking any chances with it.

As for fighting for fun, like a Burroughs Martian: Some primitives did this, e.g. in Australia. They met by appointment, lined up a traditional distance apart, and threw spears until someone was badly hurt. Thereupon the "battle" was called off until the return match next year. However, such "fighting" is a rough sport rather than a serious combat. I have seen two teams of Irishmen do each other more harm in the course of a "peaceful" game of hockey. In such fun-fighting, the damage is limited by the ground rules and by the ineffectiveness of the weapons. Given deadlier weapons (e.g. the Martian longsword) or closer

combat, and the fight becomes a matter of grim earnest. Then the fun-fighters get killed off, while those who take a more practical view of homicide survive. The Western quick-draw artist is done in by somebody who ambushes him and shoots him in the back with a rifle.

About the industrialization of preindustrial peoples: Nobody to my knowledge knows why some such folk take readily to the technological revolution, while others don't. Among the major nations, of course, Japan is the outstanding example of one that did. Egypt, India, and China seem to be in the throes of the process. When I was in India, I was pleased to observe that the Indians now make a quite practical, useful compact automobile, the Hindustan Ambassador, and astonished to discover that they make the last thing I should have expected of them—a good, potable brand of whiskey.

Judging by their technical aptitude, one might say that the Eskimos could easily become an industrial people if they weren't so thinly spread and so wanting in resources. As for the Pathans or Pakhtuns, they are still hard at their weaponmaking. A few years ago a reporter visited one of their armsmaking villages and found them busily turning out serviceable machine guns on hand lathes. He asked the headman if they had heard of the atomic bomb. Sure, said the chief; you get us one for a sample and we'll make you an atomic bomb. Maybe they could, at that.

*Well, if there are so many difficulties in putting a dash of superscience—or even contemporary science—into a swordplay story, then why do writers keep trying it? There is an eminently prac-*

tical reason: A man on foot can cover only about twenty to thirty miles a day at best, and only a little better on horseback. In an airship, one can get from here to there in practically no time at all. This, obviously, can speed up a story plot tremendously, particularly the double-track cliff-hanger Burroughs liked so well, where action alternates between two characters in widely separated places. Unfortunately, introduction of weapons of technology comparable to transport devices will speed up the battles, ambushes, assassinations, and duels to the point where there is scarcely any story left to tell.

Burroughs's own solution to the discrepancy between weaponry and transport was to get the reader so swept up with the fast-moving plot that there was scarcely time to breathe, much less think; and to hope the reader wouldn't remember those radium rifles.

Another way to justify the anachronisms is to set the action in a rapidly evolving society, so the writer can with some plausibility introduce only those mechanical contrivances which will help the story along and ignore those that would get in the way. It is a bit difficult to justify the circumstances such that something as complex as an airship is available, while something as simple as a pistol is not. On the other hand, one could construct a quite plausible world where bicycles are available (ball bearings aren't that hard to make if you know what you want) and gunpowder isn't to be had. Swordsmen astride bicycles—it's a fascinating thought.

But all this pushes the writer towards sorcery as a source of plot-speeding elements. Sorcery is so nicely under the writer's control—he can define

his particular brand of witchcraft to have whatever powers and limits he may choose. The matter of limits is critical: whether the sorcerer is the hero or the villain, his power must be sufficiently limited so that he is vulnerable in some or other way, else the writer will find himself trapped by the Superman problem. Jack Vance developed an ingenious limit, reminiscent of the problem of the Poem "AMRA": a magician could memorize but a limited number of spells and, having used a spell, had to rememorize it from his books before reuse. In many a sword-and-sorcery tale, the magician's fatal limitation was that he couldn't cast a spell as quickly as the hero could swing a sword. Still another limit, which hasn't received the attention it deserves, is for the sorcerer's power to last only so long as his or (usually) her virginity does. So—anybody for seduction-and-sorcery?

George H. Scithers



**ARMING THE  
INCOMPLETE  
ENCHANTER**  
by  
**JERRY E. POURNELLE**

THIS ARTICLE IS concerned with the kind of equipment Harold Shea should have carried when he went traveling in his syllogismobile. Before looking at the equipment, let's get the ground rules set. On his first adventure, Harold didn't know that firearms, matches, Boy Scout Handbooks, and other here-and-now technological devices wouldn't work, so he didn't provide himself with much of an outfit. On most of his trips after the second adventure, he wasn't able to make much preparation at all, since he was unaware of his impending departure. We will accordingly confine this discussion to one adventure in which he not only knew where he was going, but actually arrived there, having outfitted himself in what he thought was a proper manner. This was the journey to the land of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which is the second episode of the book, *The Incomplete Enchanter*.<sup>\*</sup> We will also omit

<sup>\*</sup> L. Sprague de Camp & Fletcher Pratt, *The Incomplete Enchanter*, New York. Pyramid Books, 1962.

sorcery and preparations therefore; Shea and his companion never did find out how properly to prepare for that sort of thing, which is half the fun of the series; and besides, they were often called upon to defend themselves in situations where sorcery was strictly out.

Shea's preparations are, I fear, simply not in keeping with his general intelligence. Finding that the "medieval stuff" in the costume shop was of no use whatever, what with the armor made of wool and paint, and the swords made of wood, Shea hies himself to antique shops, where he finds mostly "Civil War cavalry sabers." Shea decides to use a modern fencing épée or dueling sword, removing the button and grinding on a sharp point. I've got one myself I made some years ago, doubtless just after my first reading of *Enchanter*.

In the story, Shea makes quite a reputation for himself with this toy, skewering several good and famous knights, assorted demons and goblins, and uncounted men-at-arms. As far as I can tell from a close reading of the story, this weapon plus some rather outlandish clothing from a stage rendition of *Robin Hood* are all the gear Shea takes with him; and, I repeat, this is not in keeping with the man's general intelligence. In fact, it is nothing short of damn foolishness; and the result would have been quite different from the way de Camp and Pratt wrote it. Our Hero would have got himself killed in the first real fight he got into, ruining the story and depriving all of us of something to talk about. Even if he would have managed to survive, he gave himself a pretty slim chance. If he couldn't find something better, he would have done well to carry one of the Civil War cavalry sabers; it wouldn't have been very good,



but it was a better bet than the épée.

Let's look at the kind of opposition Our Hero was up against. I'm a little hampered by not having a copy of the *Faerie Queene* around, but I can get most of it from the *Enchanter*. The main thing is that it's set in a time of feudal chivalry, and a rather idealized chivalry at that. We have the following main features:

1. There's quite a lot of combat required. It won't be fighting in the ranks, and the opponents who count are heavy cavalry who indulge in single combat rather than charging en masse. The enemy is likely to be somewhat better equipped than the rider, but the predicament of Our Hero is obvious, and the expected outcome is that the horse will stomp his brains out.

2. Even in ground combat, one's opponent is likely to be wearing armor. The Good Guys will shed it when fighting an unarmored gentleman, but the Bad Guys are likely to be mean about the whole thing. The armor will be plate, not chain mail.

3. Missile weapons are available, but not extensively used. Arrows don't usually penetrate armor, the Welsh longbow not having been introduced to the yeomanry, so most people don't carry bows. I presume that archery and its associated technology is an underdeveloped art.

4. The principal weapons of the time are sword and lance, supplemented by axe, *morgenstern* and mace, quarterstaff, and even halberd. The sword is likely to be a great heavy affair without glittering net, no point, a grip long enough for it to be held with both hands but capable of being used one-handed, and a heavy pommel to balance the thing off. A very unwieldy and unhandy weapon, but

well suited for combat between armored men. The hand guard is undeveloped, consisting of a simple crossbar.

5. One's opponents aren't going to know anything about scientific fencing. Our Hero does; and his major advantage is that he knows how to lunge, while his adversary is stuck with the pass. Our Hero will, we trust, execute a clean lunge, keeping his body and legs in a line and not turning his feet.

The limiting restrictions under the ground rules imposed by the story are:

1. Neither Shea nor his companion were rich. Both were psychologists in an endowed hospital, a notoriously underpaid profession even today and more so in 1940. Still, they were not broke; and if one is about to put one's life on the line, it's nice to have the best equipment you can afford, even if you have to eat beans for a month to get it.

2. Apparently there was a limit to the gear that could be carried along. It had to fit on a back pack or otherwise be carried on the person. We can assume that chests and chests of gear would simply not go through the transition, although you could bring along people who were not aware of what you were doing. We'll also assume that dumb animals couldn't make it: no pack or riding horses, no German shepherds, etc.

3. You can take *technique*, but not *technology*. Somehow, modern fencing, although unknown in the *Faerie Queene*, will still work; guns, matches, compasses, etc. will not. I'm not sure about modern medicine, distilleries, and the like. I presume modern metals will preserve their qualities, since Shea's *épée*, in order to stand up to all the attacks it was subjected to, must have been damn good

steel. Therefore, it seems reasonable that armor made of Duralumin or stainless steel would work as intended, although to stay in keeping with 1940 technology, Duralumin may be out.

Now that we've set up the situation, we can start equipping Our Hero. Remember, he's a fair-to-middling modern fencer, not particularly strong, and not particularly big. He's going to be up against men who aren't big, but they're strong like Superman compared with the average modern. Those guys are used to swinging that great, heavy sword with one hand, lopping off arms and heads and like that.

The first thing we have to do is dispose of that *épée*. I say it with some disappointment, because it makes a good story, but it won't work. It just isn't heavy enough to parry with, and Shea is going to have to rely on his parries until he can steal some armor. The likely result of *épée* against broadsword is this: the knight or magician steps forward, swinging his sword at Hero's arm. Hero has two choices: a. stop thrust to the arm, which may work if he's fast enough; and b, parry. But the parry will be swept aside with consequent severe damage to the Hero's physiognomy, the *épée* probably broken in the process. Now it's true that even modern sabermen tend to forget there's a point on that thing, and I've won more than one bout by using *épée* tactics with a saber; but in each case the opponent was drawn out of line by a threatened cut, after which I managed to get the point on target. With the *épée*, there's no chance of threatening a cut.

No we have to face it. You just can't make much of a parry with light weapons. I've played the game, several times, of *épée* versus ribbon saber,

the ribbon saber being a thing like a cavalry saber rather than the thin, light affair of our modern competition saber, and I lost about as often as I won. True, my opponent with the ribbon saber knew modern fencing; but he also had a lot lighter weapon than Our Hero has to face; and even then, I didn't have enough mass in my weapon to be able to keep my point in line. Once you get out of line with an *épée*, you have no edge to use, so your weapon is useless. Furthermore, the method of gripping an *épée*, particularly a French *épée*, doesn't make for strong beats, strong parries, or fast recoveries from strong beats. Even the Italian, Belgian, and Spanish *épées* suffer from this defect to some extent. But without the capability to exert some force against the enemy's blade, you can't get him into a situation where he can conveniently be skewered. No, that *épée* has to go, at least as the main weapon, although it may be useful as a second weapon, and of course Shea had it free.

So far, too, we've talked about unarmored combat. That toothpick is obviously useless against a man in armor. Unfortunately, almost anything except several years of training is going to be useless under those circumstances, but we'll get back to that in a minute. There are a few items which might be worth taking along to deal with the situation.

With the *épée* disposed of, we have two broad categories of sword to choose from. The best known is the rapier.

After giving the matter some thought, my vote is for saber rather than the rapier. The reasons are technical. In order to make a certain strong beat with the rapier—and I'm talking about a heavy rapier, by the way—you have to rotate the hand,

beat with the flat, then rotate the hand again to use the point properly. To make a good cut, you have to get your hand in an awkward position, and although we are going to use the point mostly (that part of the *Enchanter* is exactly correct), we do want to be able to cut. In particular, we want to be able to cut to the cuff and forearm against an unarmored man. Now that indicates rotation of the hand in order to make a point attack with the saber, and this is a little slower. On the other hand, we can beat without preparation, and if we beat in quarte (high inside line), and follow through with point to elbow, we can do so with a single movement. This attack will be our most common one, varied with attack without preparation and single disengagement.

Now, of the sabers easily available to Shea, most were undoubtedly curved and therefore not suitable for the kind of fencing he would do; and furthermore they wouldn't have a real bell guard, which he'd need. The handguard on Shea's ideal weapon need not be solid; the attacks on the hand will not be from the point, and a basket hilt would be suitable to catch cuts. It must be well made, though. Those cuts will have real force behind them.

Still they made all kinds of swords and sabers for the Civil War (or War Between the States, if you're a diehard). Even if you couldn't find the sort of thing needed in an antique shop, and the chances of finding a good-quality saber with appropriate handguard are rather good, you could still have one made. I could have the ideal weapon forged from high-quality steel for less than \$200 right here in Orange County, and that's at 1965 prices. Shea should have been able to beat that by quite a bit.

I'm afraid Shea didn't use his head. He could have afforded one whale of a lot better weapon than that *épée*. If he had thought about it, he would have found himself something like a proper sword and probably have made it a bit more probable that he would end up in such pleasant circumstances instead of in small pieces scattered about the landscape. The sword would ideally have a slight curve, be sharp along about a third of the back edge with a definite thickening along the back for added mass and impact, have a crossbar and bellguard to protect the fingers, and a leather loop for inserting the index finger into. This last gives remarkably good control. In addition, he might have had a brass strip riveted to the base of the back edge, which would be useful in hanging up the opponent's sword and thus making it easier to dispatch him.

Now, we may have spent all of his money on the sword, but supposing he has a little left to spare, what else might he carry along? After all, we've tooled him up for unarmored combat on foot; but what's he to do against a walking—or riding—tank?

Against a fully armored opponent, he can't do much. Those guys were experts, trained from an early age, and although we might at great expense outfit Shea with better armor than his enemy, he's going to be unhorsed and beaten. If he faces a mounted enemy, what he'd better do is hope his horse is faster. In the story, Shea never had to fight that way, and a good thing for him, too.

Unhorsed, but with armor, he also has troubles, but not quite as bad. Let's see what help we can give Our Hero for this situation. The first thing to do is to design some defensive equipment. It must

be light enough to allow Shea to fence while wearing it. It also ought to be designed for the kind of fighting most expected: and now we come to a problem. Must we guard against arrows? It would help, of course, if Shea were immune to missile attacks; but let's just say that this isn't part of our design requirement, for the very good reason that that would get very expensive. He'll have to take his chances on missiles and concentrate on winning in combat with an armored swordsman.

We don't need to worry about point attacks. Shea's enemies are all slashers, and his stance is such that there isn't too much that can be slashed. In fact, the sword arm is Shea's most vulnerable part, followed by the head. Something like a war helmet (there weren't war surplus helmets available in 1940, but something like that would have have been available), if possible with riveted or welded nose guard and shoulder plates takes care of the latter; and a leather jacket with some chain sewed into it should do nicely for the arm. Presto: at not too great cost and a lot less weight than the enemy is carrying, Shea is protected, at least temporarily. Now, how are we going to dispose of the other guy? He is more or less invulnerable to Shea's sword, and he is in a lot better physical shape than Our Hero, so he won't tire out as quickly.

In an open field, single combat, we probably have him. He's ungainly in all that equipment, and Shea can manage to get behind him and push him down, or otherwise get him prone. Then Shea can find a weak joint in the armor if Sir Muscles won't give up. In an enclosed space, though, we got troubles. Shea can parry cuts for a while, but can't hit him, and can't get around him. What to do?

It all depends on whether Shea wants to carry a rather ungainly weapon around. What we do is make him a poleaxe, a pike with axehead as well as point, with handguards built on. Shea ought to be able to floor him with *that*; but of course it's heavy and can't be carried at all times. On the other hand, we don't expect Shea to fight armored knights on foot very often either, so it balances out.

The equipment list goes like this:

1. A fairly straight saber-type sword, heavy enough for real parries, light enough to use for fencing, with a good handguard and a leather finger-loop for the index finger to help control it. Second choice is a rapierlike sword with fairly heavy blade and real handguard.

2. A helmet, helmet liner, and suspension system; with noseguard and shoulder plates. This thing won't protect against a real swipe from a broadsword, but it should manage to stop those cuts which get through parries or which go on to the target after Shea has put his point through the other fellow's arm.

3. A leather jacket, with chain sewed into the right arm, and—if you like—vertical stripes of chain down the chest to protect against cuts which get through the guard. Three lengths of chain should be sufficient.

4. Optional: a poleaxe, from five to seven feet long, with both point and axe blade, and handguards attached. (I'm not really optimistic about surviving the armored versus unarmored combat in a confined space, even with this, but I'd rather try it than just use my sword if I can't run away. I haven't quite made up my mind about length, either; any suggestions?)



This, we assume, exhausts Shea's money. Some other time, I'll take up the question of relaxing the ground rules and allowing all kind of modern technique and gear that doesn't depend on unacceptable technology; and also, what happens if you can take your own horse and pack him up with things. For now, we'll leave Harold Shea in his apartment, under the watchful eye of the landlady, with the above equipment slung onto himself while he recites, "If P equals not-Q, Q implies not-P; which is equivalent to saying. . . ."

Lots of luck, Harold. You'll need it.

*I think Dr. P. is right. If I were writing the story today instead of nearly forty years ago, I'd set things up pretty much along the lines he proposes. But alas! that is not likely to happen. The lady who wrote: "Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight," never claimed that Time had obeyed her hest.*

L. Sprague de Camp



## THE COMPLEAT DUELIST

by

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

THE CONANIAN CORPUS teems with scenes wherein pirates, competing for the captaincy or perhaps just irked at each other, settle the matter with swinging cutlasses. Conan and Sergius, Conan and Zaporavo, Conan and Galaccus, Conan and . . . Not to mention the countless duels of Solomon Kane and other Howardian heroes.

For a dueling story to end all dueling stories, we must refer to the memoirs of Louis le Golif, a Norman buccaneer of the Spanish Main, known to the trade as Borgnefesse ("Half-Arse") from having had part of one buttock taken off by a cannon ball in an early engagement. Le Golif tells a story about his friend Captain Fulbert, which if not true—and le Golif certainly loved tall tales—ought to be. (*Memoirs of a Buccaneer*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1954, pp. 197-211)

After the capture of Vera Cruz in 1683, Fulbert took one of the captive Spanish girls under his protection and challenged any who had ideas of sharing her around like the rest. The first man to take up the challenge was a six-footer with an

oversized cutlass, which he opposed to Fulbert's rapier. Fulbert ran him through and mortally wounded him.

The second was a smaller but faster cutlass man. Fulbert ran him through the shoulder and crippled him.

The third, a stocky man, swung a battle-axe in each hand. He drove one axe into a table and, while he was trying to pull it out, Fulbert repeatedly ran him through and killed him.

The fourth was a drunkard with a boarding pike. Fulbert parried the pike in seconde and spitte the man with a stop-thrust.

The fifth, a clubfooted man with a cutlass, and a knife in his left hand, wounded Fulbert in the shoulder; but Fulbert pierced one of his eyes, and the man gave up the contest.

The sixth was a small man but a skilled fencer, with a long Spanish rapier. Fulbert killed him after a long passage.

The seventh relied on a beltful of throwing knives. He got a knife into Fulbert's leg and killed a bystander with another. Then he ran, with Fulbert after him pricking him in the rump.

The eighth wounded Fulbert with a Turkish scimitar before Fulbert killed him.

By this time Fulbert had lost so much blood that he could barely stand. Therefore le Golif announced that anybody who still wanted to fight would have to fight him, "for I was so heated that I would have ripped open dozens of them, one after the other, had it been necessary." Fulbert lost his wounded leg but recovered, and he and the girl lived happily together for another fifteen years or so until she died of yellow fever.

It can be done!

# REARMING THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER

by  
JERRY E. POURNELLE

A LONG TIME ago when I lived in fabulous Buena Park (a peaceful place now, with no fame beyond Knott's Berry Farm and an undeserved reputation for ultraconservative politics; but prior to 1920 they used to shoot the sheriff at least annually) my telephone rang. It used to ring quite often, what with political campaigns, siding salesmen, rug-cleaning outfits, and occasionally a rush call from the Apollo program on which I worked in those dear dead days before Space took second place to the Dole; but this time the voice at the other end was the Amra editorial staff, who Had a Problem: they were temporarily assigned in the Buena Park environs, wanted to publish Amra for some nefarious reason, and had no Selectric typewriter handy.

They were also short an article. The result was that Amra got typed on my machine—the same one I'm using to do this article, by the way; those Selectrics are durable—and I wrote an article

called "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter". My piece was all about what Harold Shea should have carried and didn't, when he went roaming about amongst the knights bold and ladies amorous of the Faerie Queene, and at its end I promised to write another carrying the tale of Shea's quarter-master corps to its logical conclusion. I promptly forgot the promise and the Amra editorial horde being essentially Nice Guys about not bugging people (or maybe there's a message there? No, I'm sure not) I wasn't reminded of it again until my postman brought me a Book.

Now, my postman often brings me books. Usually, though, the Post Office hasn't utterly destroyed the mailing label and container—and if it has, the book is in a similar state of decay. In this case, though, somehow at the Studio City Post Office there had arrived or appeared or materialized one each perfect copy of *The Conan Grimoire*, shorn of all wrappings. Without even looking inside to see that there was an article by me he promptly brought it to my doorstep. I'm sure there's a message there.

Naturally I read my own article first, as what writer doesn't? And being reminded of my promise, and having several publishers' deadlines to meet, bills to pay, and people screaming at me for a story or article or something that will bring in money (no, not my publishers screaming; my creditors, and the Angel of My Life and Mother of My Children—both the same creature, perhaps fortunately) I promptly sat down to fulfill my promise.

Where were we? I had last equipped Harold Shea with:

1. A fairly straight saber heavy enough for par-

ries but light enough to fence with, with a good handguard and a leather finger-loop for the index finger inside the guard.

2. A helmet, helmet liner, and suspension system with noseguard and shoulder plates.

3. A leather jacket with chain sewed into the right arm and vertical stripes of chain down the chest to protect against cuts which get through the parries. Three lengths of chain "should be sufficient" wrote I.

4. A poleaxe some five to seven feet long with point and axe blade, with handguards attached.

These, I had insisted, would have been superior to that *épée* which was so famous, but which was likely in the actual event to have got Harold sliced into mincemeat. I note that Mr. de Camp more or less agreed with my analysis and was kind enough to say so at the end of my article.

Well, I've had some Second Thoughts. Many of them come from my alter ego, a gent known as Jerome Robert, Laird o' McKenna, Knight Marshal of the Kingdom of the West, who goes about getting bashed under the auspices of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc., and gets to watch a number of other gents do the same. When I wrote "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter" I'd had only experience with modern fencing—i.e., I was in the same position, and suffering from the same delusions, as Harold Shea before he visited the world of the Iron Men. Since then I've had the pleasure of fighting men in armor and doing a bit of it myself, and it's illuminating.

My first conclusion is that Shea's *épée* wasn't as silly as I'd thought; it could be useful, but not as de Camp and Pratt intended. As I wrote in the earlier article, one swipe from a medieval broadsword

would brush aside any parry you could make with an *épée* and probably break the toothpick in the bargain: a fact unalterably and painfully true. But Shea isn't going to parry. He isn't going to cross swords with his opponent either. I'd had a mental picture of the armored man standing in something like a modern fencing stance, but with his feet square and his body perpendicular to the line of engagement, his sword held out in front of him like Errol Flynn, making great sweeping cuts with a heavy sword that he could handle well enough but still being a bit unwieldy.

It don't Work That Way. Actually, the man in armor will stand with his left foot forward (assuming him right-handed), his shield held squarely forward, and his sword upraised above his head and parallel with the ground to protect from straight-down chops. He swings the sword in a wide arc without preparatory movement—and when he does, Harold's dead.

However, if Harold's fast enough, he wins. He stands as far from his armored opponent as possible, and as soon as the "Begin" is cried he lunges, without preparation or warning, straight for the eye-slits. He'd better be accurate, because he gets one and only one chance; but a good *épée* man can hit a ping-pong ball bobbing about at the end of a long rubber band, so we assume Harold can do it, too.

That's about the only thing Harold can do with that *épée*, though, if he's facing plate armor of good design. He has to go for a kill, and do it instantly, or else spend a lot of time retreating around the field waiting for a similar shot, and then do it instantly; but either way he gets one thrust only, it had better be lethal, and except for



his lethal attack he can't afford to ever let his enemy get within striking distance of him. He can't be chivalrous and disable his enemy unless there is a really obvious chink in his opponent's armor, and a thrust to the chink will disable instantly. Otherwise he thrusts, the point goes in—and the Iron Man slices Harold's head off.

Against an armored man, though, the *épée* is likely to be more useful than that axe I designed. The *épée* will get through the armor—there have to be eye-slits or holes to see out of—more easily than the axe. Shea can lunge, giving him several feet more lethal radius than his enemy. His weapon is far more easily controlled than his enemy's—and the *épée* far more likely to succeed than the axe, because Shea doesn't expose himself until he's actually killing his enemy with the *épée*, while just getting into distance with the axe will probably get Harold killed. Axe and shield (or axe without shield) does not win against sword and shield with equal opponents—and Harold ain't nothing like equal in ability to the man he faces. His fencing training will actually hamper him when he fights with medieval weapons.

Another of my conclusions that Have To Go was that Harold might be able to exploit his unarmored status, running about the field until his plated enemy tires, then approaching from behind and pushing that ton of junk down to the ground.

Uh-uh. Good plate armor doesn't tire you out that way. It doesn't hamper vision or movement very much, either. The idea of the unwieldy man unable to move is one of those myths whose origin I don't recall, but it was helped along by T. H. White who ought to have known better. Now it is

true that as gunpowder and longbow developed, plate got heavier and heavier, until we reached the period of King James VI (or I, according to the English). King James, watching one of his knights arm in the wishfully firearms-proof armor of that late period, said: "I see the armor serves two purposes: it prevents anyone from harming my knights, and it prevents their harming anyone else." Harold, though, is going to fight men in really well-designed plate who wear it precisely because it is more agile than chain mail; being suspended from many points of the anatomy rather than shoulders only (as mail is), good plate is also less tiring.

In other words, Harold better stab quick and deep; he won't get behind his enemy and push him down or do any of the other rather clever things I'd thought he could do. Actually, if I'd been thinking when I wrote that nonsense, I'd have known better—it should be obvious that the Iron Men wore armor for a reason, and they didn't dominate the peasants for centuries by making themselves ineffective. I'm reminded of the various forms of Oriental unarmed combat that are supposedly so superior to swords and like that: they were developed by subjugated peoples not allowed to have weapons; and they *stayed* subjugated by the weapons carriers.

Having saved the *épée* for use against single armored enemies who fight with broadsword and shield, and being glad of it because I *liked* that *épée*, we're faced with another problem: it won't work all that often. Those Iron Men weren't stupid, and after Harold has demonstrated that lunge—which is really his only advantage: a long, thin, pointed weapon suitable for poking through

eye-slits being known as long as was armor—they're going to Take Steps. What they'll probably do is gang up on Harold and have their grooms kill him out of hand for unchivalrous combat, but assuming that one of them decides to face Harold in single combat, he'll put his shield up, crouch behind it, and overrun; literally bowl Harold over onto the ground. There are other things they could do, too.

The problem is, Harold still has no defense. He can't parry with the toothpick, he has only a limited number of places he can thrust to, and he must keep out of the swordsman's reach or die. Can we not help him?

It does no good to cover him with armor. Weight does count, and neither Harold nor any of us in the twentieth century can design armor more adapted for the human frame than was made in the time of the *Faerie Queene*. The Iron Men are stronger than Harold, more used to combat with their weapons, and far deadlier. Harold has only his skills as a twentieth-century fencer, his wits, and his agility.

We can, however, give him some reasonable protection consistent with his advantages. A Great Kilt, for example. Now, I'm not talking about the modern, sewn, pleated kilt worn by gentlemen and paraders; I mean the old Genuine Article, about ten yards of thick woollen cloth, bunched up around the waist and over the kidneys, pleated over the legs, carried over the back in bunches and pinned over the left shoulder. I can testify that this makes pretty good armor. It probably wouldn't stand up to a really well-aimed and well-delivered blow, but it provides far more protection than you'd think; unless the Iron Man

gets his weight into it and cuts just right, Harold might, given the protection of a Great Kilt, survive for a second thrust.

Of course, we don't leave him with the kilt alone. The combat helmet with liner and riveted shoulder and face guards will have to be kept; and my leather jacket with chains sewn inside is a definite must, the difference being that now I'd advocate wire to attach the chains, and put the chains *outside* the jacket. I'd also advocate far more than the three lengths of chain I specified in "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter."

What about fighting an unarmored man? That was Harold's first encounter in the world of the Faerie Queene, his opponent chivalrously shedding his iron suit to give Harold an equal chance. Well, it wouldn't go as described in the Sacred Texts. There wouldn't be any phrases, engagements, and parries. What would happen is the Iron Man would raise his sword, Harold would nimbly retreat in fencer's stance, the Iron Man would pursue—and Harold lunges to get him neatly in the wrist, forearm, or elbow, preventing that deadly chop that takes Harold's head off. The result wouldn't be much different, but the methods would. That *épée* would work pretty well after all.

I discovered this in practice, fighting some of the Knights of the Society. They were good with broadsword or they wouldn't be Knights; but their technique hadn't taught them anything about defending against point attack to the arm. On the other hand, they weren't stupid; and after I'd done it to one, it was difficult to do it to him again—or to someone who had seen it done. They adapted

quickly, as would any man familiar with his weapons.

Thus, we are back to the requirement for a weapon with which you can parry. Harold can win an engagement or two with his épée; but after that, the Iron Men will be wary of him, change their tactics, and use the weight of their swords and the strengths of their arms to dominate Harold's toothpick.

I am proud to say, then, that the basic weapon I chose for Harold in "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter" was correct: a good saber, not much curve and with a good sharp point—the point attack is still our best—but heavy enough to parry a broadsword attack, and with enough hand protection to keep Harold from getting his fingers cut off. If Harold had the strength of wrist to swing it properly, the Scottish basket-hilted broadsword—called a claymore in a lot of the literature of the time it was used, I don't care what Mr. de Camp says, although I concede that originally "claymore" is a corruption of the Gaelic word for a two-handed broadsword—that would be the best thing he could carry. He probably couldn't afford a really good one, such as the Wilkinson I almost bought (but decided to make the house payment instead); but it would be a good investment. Armed with *that* and his ability to use the point, Harold would be a match for any unarmed man in town.

Since he won't have the strength to heft quite that much sword properly, we are back to the Civil War sabers mentioned in the Texts and rejected by Harold for unaccountable reasons; and they would have done quite nicely, again probably as-

sureing Harold of success and survival.

In fact, I am now convinced that against unarmored men a good modern fencer would have done very well in Medieval times. Although the Society's Knights are probably not as good as the best of that era, they are good indeed, and we've been able to field-test the problem. The broadswordsmen fighting the modern saberman, each using the techniques he has learned, will lose if both are unarmored. Give the broadswordsmen his shield and you've got another problem. That shield is a weapon, and a good one. The Iron Man tucks himself in behind it, withholding his weapons and arms and like that out of reach of even my best lunge; and it's hard to do anything to him. Then his forward rush with shield to overrun me is damned hard to stop or retreat from. Given retreating room, and given free use of the point, the modern fencer has a good chance, though. Take the point away from him, and he's doomed, even if you give him a shield of his own. The point and the lunge are the modern's weapons, and he must be able to use them. Any attempt to fight on the Iron Man's terms gets the fencer killed rather quickly.

Where does that leave us, then? Actually, Harold is better off than I thought he might be. He carries:

1. The trusty *épée*, honed to needle point.
2. A good saber. Since both saber and *épée* won't weigh any more than the Iron Man's broadsword, Harold can carry both in the same scabbard, although designing a good scabbard for carrying a bell-guarded *épée* is far from easy, as I've learned to my sorrow.
3. Ten yards of good woolen tartan, a wide

leather belt studded with metal rings, and knowledge of the arcane art of pleating this mess into a Great Kilt. He could (horrors) wear trousers under the kilt if he's worried about how his knobby knees look.

4. A good leather jacket sewn over with chain, the chain secured with wire.

5. A military helmet on which he has welded or riveted a nose guard and shoulder plates; better would be that he finds out how to make chain mail and makes himself a mail hood covering head and shoulders, and puts on nasal-armored helmet over that. (Pity that Harold couldn't have subscribed to *Tournaments Illuminated* in 1940.)

He uses the épée against unhorsed men in armor (against horsemen, he's dead anyway) and the saber against unarmored men who show some talent for fencing. He's prepared to retreat quickly—that's in character anyway—and avoid shield rushes. And although he's got some problems, he's got a better chance of living through all this than I originally thought.

Moreover, although I had promised in "Arming the Incomplete Enchanter" to look at what Harold might have taken if he'd had plenty of money, we'd stayed within the original limits of the Texts. There isn't a lot more to add to the package, even given unlimited funds and carrying capacity. He could use greaves, and they could be made reasonably cheaply from steel. Given a lot of time, he could sew iron rings flat onto his leather jacket—William the Conqueror wore that type armor in preference to anything else—starting with a knee-length leather overcoat. He could then discard the Great Kilt, but he'd want something under the jacket for padding. Quilting was

used in Them There Days and would be available in 1940. A modern hunting crossbow might help keep his enemies at a distance and give him a bit of protection against cavalry. They're expensive, but anyone who can shoot a rifle can fire one pretty accurately. However, being slow on the reload, they're useable only against a single enemy (or several very slow ones).

With all this gear, a horse to help carry it wouldn't hurt, and a well-trained German shepherd might come in handy. But even with only the basics, Harold just may do all right at that. So once again we'll leave him under the curious gaze of his landlady. There sits Harold, wearing Great Kilt and greaves, two swords at his side and helmet on his head, while his landlady goes for the police. Quickly now, Harold, before the men in white coats come: "If  $P$  equals not- $Q$ ,  $Q$  implies not- $P$ ; which is equivalent to saying . . ."

Good luck, Harold. I think we might see you again at that.



# **RICHARD THE LION-HEARTED IS ALIVE AND WELL IN CALIFORNIA**

by  
**POUL ANDERSON**

BEGINNINGS ARE SELDOM easy to find. Origins lie far back and obscurely in time. So it is with the Society for Creative Anachronism. We know that David Thewlis and Kenneth de Maife took up fencing while in the Air Force and continued it after both had moved to the San Francisco area. Gradually they got interested in other weapons and began to construct and experiment with non-lethal versions, such as wooden broadswords and padded exotic clothes. Out of these various elements came the idea of calling a tournament. The first was held in Berkeley on May Day 1966, in the back yard of Diana Paxson, as she was then named. The story goes that she called the police beforehand and asked if some kind of permit was needed for such an affair, and that they were utterly astounded that anyone in Berkeley would ask their approval of anything. However, the law said nothing one way or another about tournaments.

Period costumes were encouraged and a surprising number of them showed up. The bashing was satisfactorily furious. Afterward the gathering paraded down Telegraph Avenue to protest the twentieth century. All in all, this modest beginning was so successful that everyone agreed it should be repeated.

By the time that it was, on 25 June, procedures were already becoming well established. The event took place on the greensward of a public park, as isolated as possible from chance passersby. Costume was required of spectators as well as participants. A name had been found for the association. Appropriate people stood ready to preside, to judge the combats, and to make suitable awards. Musicians—a local group specializing in medieval and Renaissance music played on authentic instruments—were on hand.

In the following years, the society has grown like an avalanche. It is hard to gauge the membership, since to appear at any function in proper garb is automatically to become a member and there are no dues or registry. But one or two hundred total attendance is not uncommon, and the official magazine, *Tournaments Illuminated*, has a comparable subscription list. (Available from Box 1332, Los Altos, California at \$3.00 per year and well worth it.) Similar groups are beginning to spring up elsewhere. Obviously this activity fulfills a need for color and ceremony, sadly lacking in the modern world.

These qualities exist as abundantly in the society as in a British regiment. While it has no written constitution—that would be unmedieval!—organic law has been by now quite elaborately evolved.

The society holds five annual functions. Four of these are crown tournaments, as close in time as practicable to the equinoxes, the summer solstice, and May Day. Midwinter weather being tricky, the fifth consists of Twelfth Night revels. These last are presided over by a Lord of Misrule, and include feasting, drinking, contests in minstrelsy, dramatic performances, music, and dancing. In addition, throughout the year occur lesser events, such as special tournaments, parties, the Ducal War, and the participation of numerous members in the annual Renaissance Pleasure Faire.

In theory, the government is an absolute monarchy. In practice, the king takes advice from his court, and many decisions are made by those who do the actual behind-the-scenes work. Administrative meetings and consultations are informal, usually uncostumed—though they tend to end up with long discussions of weaponmaking, fighting techniques, dress, and rituals.

The king is the man who did best in the final series of combats at the previous crown tournament. He must have a Queen of Love and Beauty, though he may wait until he is victorious to name her. The crown prince is, of course, his heir apparent. The dukes are those who have won the kingship at least twice. The knights are those who have been given the accolade by a king for valiant and skillful combat. Only knights may be addressed as "Sir" and wear the white belt and chain of their status. Certain warriors, worthy of the honor, have for good and sufficient reasons chosen not to swear fealty to the crown. They bear the title of "Master," are equal to knights, and wear the belt as a baldric. The mastership is also bestowed for extraordinary noncombatant service to

the society, as in making the necessary equipment, and there is a female equivalent rank whose name has not quite been determined upon as of this writing; these people constitute the Order of the Laurel. All such title holders, together with permanent officials like the Seneschal, the Herald, the Chronicler, and the King at Arms, constitute the royal court.

Anyone may take any other title he wishes; hence we have quite a few counts, barons, and so forth. Similarly, anyone may form a household, organized however he sees fit. Typically a household consists of a knight, his lady and other members of the immediate family, a squire, a page, a lady-in-waiting or two, and perhaps a few friends. Squires are boys or young men who serve a knight in exchange for instruction in the arts of combat and the manners of chivalry. This relationship, with the superior at least partly *in loco parentis*, is taken quite seriously by those concerned.

In fact, beneath its lightheartedness, the society has a number of purposes and ideals. It takes many bruising, tedious hours of practice to develop warlike skills, just as a great deal of work goes into the clothes, jewels, and other objects that make the scene so colorful. There is a conscious objective of reviving and practicing not only medieval sports and games, but medieval ceremoniousness, respect for rank, most especially courtesy and honor. This increasingly influences the more active members, much for the better, in their mundane lives.

The high standards do not detract from the fun. On the contrary, they add to it. A crown tournament is a gorgeous spectacle.

Around a broad field stand gaily hued pavil-

ions, tents, and baldaquins. Before and beneath them appear refreshments for the owners, their entourages, and others; generosity is the order of the day. Often a considerable effort has been made to obtain such food and drink as could have been had in the Middle Ages and to manufacture ornamental goblets for the latter. Banners fly overhead, bearing the arms of the members. (Anyone may assume any he chooses, providing these are not taken already in the society or the real world; however, heraldic correctness is urged, and to ensure this a College of Heraldry is being created.) A few staffs may also bear green branches, signifying a man who will not be fighting today. But most banners are flown in challenge.

The warriors move about among the equally picturesque spectators, seeking each other out to arrange combats, then registering them; in the course of this, they, and in fact everyone present, must sign a form waiving legal claims in case of injury or damage to property. Fortunately, no court cases have arisen so far. But the sport is a rough one; bruises are a near certainty, concussions and broken bones not unknown. To minimize hazards, stringent rules are laid on combatants, notably the absolute prohibition on drawing steel on the field.

Turning from these too serious matters, you might well look up and glimpse Duke Henrick galloping by in the chain mail, Norman helmet, greaves, and otherwise complete equipment he has made for himself. To date our bouts have been on foot; but what girl, chancing past, could resist loaning her horse for a while to such a figure? You might espy Sir Siegfried von Höflichkeit's winged casque, the ostrich-plumed heaume of Lord Ran-

dall (Garrett) the Stout, and Njali jarli Styrbjörnsonar in Highland dress tuning up his bagpipes—welcome even if he is, strictly speaking, more out of the nineteenth than the fourteenth century. Everybody assumes a name within the Society; if anyone cares, I am Sir Béla of Eastmarch, though my arms (azure, two suns or in pale with a saltire argent) spell out my real name for those who know the canting art. Elsewhere you may see monks, Moors, Cathayans, the Byzantine decadence of Lord Mediocrates, scantily clad slave girls, and a lady professor whose academic robes are doubtless the most authentically medieval garments in sight.

Exact procedure varies from tournament to tournament. Much depends on the will of the Supreme Autocrat, the person who has volunteered to make the necessary arrangements for today and must therefore possess considerable authority. But the customary pattern is as follows:

When the trumpets sound, a procession of court members and their households moves toward the throne. Halting, they form an aisle for the king and his queen, and hail these as they take their seats. The prince and his lady follow; the title is ceremoniously handed over with the crown; to the cry of "Long live the king!" the new royal pair mount the thrones while the earlier monarch rejoins the fighters. Then the courtiers are presented to Their Majesties; then the command is given to begin; then folk return to their places and the first combatants enter the lists. The Herald announces who they are, by their Society names, naturally, and what the reason is for which they agreed to have a battle. In this round of challenge fights, any cause will do; for glory, for pleasure, or whatever,

including japes. For example, I once challenged Simon the Templar for that he did impugn the honor of Chief Inspector Claude Eustace Teal. Unfortunately, I lost that one.

As the warriors stand some distance apart, the Herald cries: "Gentlemen, salute the King!" This they do by turning toward him and raising weapons to helmets. "Salute each other!" The mutual courtesy is given. "On your honor—begin!"

Of weapons and techniques, more anon. The commonest arms are sword and shield; two-handed sword, shortsword and buckler, axe with or without shield, mace likewise. Thrusting is forbidden as being too dangerous, except with the heavily padded shortsword. A good hard blow to an arm is considered to cut it off; the recipient must fight without it, and obviously a man who loses both arms has lost the battle. A leg blow above the knee has a similar effect; it forces the man to go down on that knee, though he may hop if the other leg remains and even with both gone he still has a chance of winning. A solid blow to the head or torso is a kill and ends the match.

Characteristically, the warriors maneuver warily, looking for an opening. Suddenly comes a flurry of action, perhaps an exchange of cuts, perhaps only one that lands just right, and the combat is over. This is quite different from the ordinary cinematic version where two actors rush in and swing wildly for minutes; but nearly all cinematic technique is terrible. To be sure, when two really good men are matched, the action may go on at length and be beautiful to watch. Still, the usual short engagement has its own excitement.

We have given up employing referees, a cum-

bersome system that led to arguments, and instead put everyone on his honor. Within the limits of human fallibility under stress, the combatants do acknowledge when they have taken a disabling or killing blow.

After the challenge fights, there may be a round robin of battles; or an archery contest; or music and dancing; or a performance by a belly dancer or a troupe of mummers, or whatever else has been arranged. Finally we come to the series which determines the next king. Any knight, master, or other man who has done well earlier in the day may enter this if he wishes. He who wins the most matches in it receives a wreath of laurel, his lady one of flowers. They will reign over the next tournament.

Frequently, if daylight remains, a melee is then organized, in which warriors choose up sides and have at each other. And when a place is available to go to, revels will follow until all hours. It is a special occasion for rejoicing if someone has this day been knighted.

Thus for the tournaments, in inadequate description. As said before, lesser ones take place irregularly, e.g., at a couple of recent science fiction conventions; the pageantry of these is necessarily restricted. People also meet in smaller groups to fight and/or feast. And the Ducal War is becoming a tradition. For this event, which is unofficial and invitational, participants and their households meet on a certain island, choose sides, and campaign over hills and through forests for the entire day. The occasion of one strife was an abduction of Lady Dorothy of Paravel, and led to the single-handed storming of the Rock by Duke Richard the Short—but the story of the various



abductions and their consequences is too long to detail here.

I have mentioned dancing. This is in any period, as nearly as may be. Weekly classes are in a school gymnasium in Berkeley, where those who like may come to learn such measures as the pavane, galliard, allemand, and lavolta. Once a month, in place of instruction, a regular dance is held, with everyone encouraged to appear in costume. For gentlemen especially, formal garb is apt to differ from that worn for fighting; it is luxurious, ornate, bejeweled, and normally includes a sword which is not wood but steel. One pleasant feature of belonging to the society is that a man can take high interest in his own dress and appearance without losing any masculinity. And hereby hangs a tale.

The gymnasium in question fronts on a street. One evening we were holding our dance when a pair of, shall I say, socially deprived youths passed by. Seeing through the glass doors those sissy characters twirling through sissy motions to sissy music, they decided to make a gesture of, shall I say, social protest. Besides a bit of mayhem on parked cars, this consisted of heaving a boulder through the door, so hard that, though safety wired, the glass sprayed halfway across the floor within.

Unfortunately for the socially deprived youths, they had chosen the wrong sissies. About a dozen drawn swords came boiling out, chased them down several blocks, cornered them with points to throats, and hailed the nearest police car.

In fact, while no doubt they average the usual percentage of lefties among them in mundane life, it is refreshing to see how well most younger

members of the society get on with the police. At the last Renaissance Pleasure Faire, a certain deputy sheriff not only did a very cool and competent job of keeping order, he played the game to the hilt—as by bowing to the High Sheriff of Nottingham, who was Lord Randall, each time they met, and this in spite of the High Sheriff and his men wearing for a badge a boar's head erased or. In consequence, Society members took up a collection to obtain and have inscribed a handsome dagger for this man, and presented it to him with due pomp and hearty cheers.

Another time, a couple of officers stopped by a tournament being held in Berkeley and remained for half an hour or so. Learning of this, the *Berkeley Barb* was preparing a story on how a group of peaceful medievalists couldn't even have a little fun without being harassed by brutal coppers. Someone who had been there explained that in fact the officers only came to warn that a few cars were illegally parked and had better be moved if the owners didn't want tickets. They stayed because they were fascinated by the sight . . . though they did offer some technical criticisms as to the handling of weapons. Accordingly, the headline in the *Barb* was changed to FUZZ MAKE OUT WITH FEUDALISTS.

Because of the number of comparatively young people, there have been several weddings within the Society. Members attend in their best costumes; the bridal couple add what variants to the ceremony their minister will agree to; afterward they go out beneath an arch of swords. Among the happy couples have been the Lady Diana, at whose then home everything first materialized, and our Chronicler, the Red Baron. Most of these

marriages have been Christian, but on one occasion, even the guru of an eclectic ashram may have been mildly astonished to find himself invoking Odin and Thor.

I hate parents who brag about their children. Nevertheless I am going to do it. A reception following such a union happened to be in a house in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. About eight P.M., a score or so of us decided to go out for fish and chips. We did, blowing minds right and left but encountering no trouble. On the way back, we got some beer. Lounging in the doorway of the store was a seedy-looking character, either drunk or high on something. As we left, sword after sword after sword parading by, he started mumbling, "Kill, hack, maim, cut, slice, destroy . . ." until my fourteen-year-old Astrid turned to him with a beaming smile of wide-eyed innocence and exclaimed in an utterly delighted tone, "Oh, are you a fascist warmonger too?"

It was out of that same house that Owen Hannifen and Clint Bigglestone surged, steel in hand, to stop an attempted kidnapping at spearpoint. "Unhand that woman!" has actually been said, entirely convincing to the villain.—But these anecdotes could go on far too long.

Instead, I shall briefly describe the gear and methods of tournament fighting, which are doubtless of premier interest to Amra readers.

Complete authenticity would be impossible to achieve. Quite apart from time and expense, genuine arms of the period could easily kill someone. Helmets are probably the most nearly correct pieces of equipment. Though a few men remain content with ordinary motorcycle helmets and plastic visors, most desire something stronger as

well as better-looking. An iron coalscuttle type with foam rubber interior padding is commonest. The best of these weighs seventeen pounds and can take the heaviest blow anyone can deliver with any weapon, without the wearer being moved. Conical Norman forms and round basinetts are also seen. The minimum allowable protection is a saber fencing mask, and this is actually inadequate.

A armor, where worn, may range from quilting here and there, through constructions of carpeting and leather, on to something as elaborate as Duke Henrick's knee-length byrnie, which took him a year to make from coathanger wire (probably better metal than in the originals). Surcoats and tabards add a look of realism. Thick gauntlets are practically a must; some men reinforce theirs with metal, or make the steel mittens that were actually used.

Shields are chiefly of sheet metal or heavy plywood; there is talk of Fiberglass. They should be padded around the edges, or covered, or both, for their own protection and that of the weapons which strike them. Even so, the attrition in blades is large. The heater, so called from its resemblance to a flatiron, is the most usual form, but kites, round shields, and small bucklers are in use, too.

After some experimentation, rattan has become the standard material for swords. It can be purchased cheaply in lengths of about twelve feet, diameters of about an inch and a half; it is comparatively durable; being soft and of round shape, it causes less damage than most woods. The swordmaker works it down to suitable elliptical cross-sections for blade and haft. For quillons, he may use glue and wrappings on two shorter

lengths of rattan; or he may shape and glue together a compound crossguard; or he may employ any of several other methods, including that of a permanent iron basket hilt in which new blades are simply fastened. An all-wooden sword needs a lead counterweight, which may be screwed or cast in place and generally doubles as a pommel; and it is advisable to wrap the handle for a firmer grip. Metallic paint goes on for looks. The length of a broadsword has been standardized at forty inches, of which six normally go to the haft. Two-handers run to five feet.

Most axes have firmly stuffed leather heads. They are heavier than one might think, and it takes a powerful pair of wrists to use them well. A halberd has a longer handle than an axe. A mace has a round head of cloth or rubber. I have already remarked that the stabbing shortsword is padded. Spears and javelins have crutch tips. If you think such weapons are effete, you have never been on the receiving end of any.

Morningstars, spiked balls on chains at the end of a pole, have been ruled out. The trouble is that, if they are made sufficiently light to be safe, they are completely unauthentic and there is no defense against them. The damned things come right around your shield at you.

Fencers and kendo men occasionally take part in tournaments. At present, some people are experimenting with rapier and dagger. No doubt still other weapons will appear. It will be interesting to see how they do.

It is likewise interesting to consider the methods of their employment. Except for a recent discovery of an old German manual by Jacob Sutter, which treats only a few kinds of arms, nobody

has yet turned up contemporary instructions for sword and shield or the like. If any of you out there know of some, the Society will be grateful for the information. Meanwhile, reconstruction has been by trial and error. The influence of judo and karate is noticeable in the results. We would love to know if the men who stood at Hastings or Crécy—a time gap which itself may have seen considerable evolution—had developed similar styles or quite different ones. In the latter case, which set would be more effective?

Master Edwin Baresark has described our approach at length in *Tournaments Illuminated*. Since those who like may send for copies, my résumé will be brief and not nearly so expert.

The important thing is always to keep your calm and self-control. Undisciplined swinging guarantees defeat. The novice to sword and shield, for example, invariably tries a sidewise roundhouse blow. Meanwhile the novice has naturally moved his shield arm to retain balance. This leaves him wide open for the expert's return blow. End of match. It is for such reasons that "bashing practice" sessions concentrate on developing the proper form.

The best stance is back erect, knees bent and tensed, feet at right angles. By releasing tension on one knee, the fighter moves quickly and smoothly in the other direction. In fact, his progress is crabwise, whether advancing or retreating, as if he shifted around the sides of the squares on a giant chessboard. It sounds awkward, but when done by a good man it is swift and graceful.

The shield is held high, just below eye level. That side is foremost—a procedure exactly opposite to that in fencing, where the sword side leads.

The shield should be moved very little: only enough up, down, or sideways to catch a blow. The sword should as a rule come over the top of the shield, not around it. Of course, this is not invariable; opportunities may occur elsewhere; but many a fighter has lost because he succumbed to the temptation to chop off a leg and thereby exposed his head. Since a dying blow is legitimate, you should not drop your guard even after you have killed your foeman, until he is stretched on the ground.

(Incidentally, at tournaments the slain are requested to lie for about thirty seconds, for the benefit of photographers; and a handshake between victor and vanquished is elementary chivalry.)

Sometimes, especially for certain individuals, a fast, charging attack with blade in motion is better than cautious preliminary maneuver. However, the man charging had better know just what he is doing. Such an aggressive approach is about the only chance that the ordinary sword and shield man has against a two-hander.

That weapon can be used in various ways. It can slash or swing in the obvious manner. More commonly it is held at a slant, often upside down, which gives better control and leverage.

The shortsword man relies entirely on speed and skill, since he has no defense except his buckler, a foot in diameter. If he can ward off his opponent's blow while getting past the latter's guard, he may well win.

An axeman may or may not run in, usually not, but he keeps his weapon whirling. Since it is so massive, it can batter past another weapon and knock a shield aside. A mace, on the other hand, is

used more in the style of a broadsword. A spear is best held near the middle, hands fairly close together with thumbs inward; this gives admirable control for guarding, and the grip can be changed fast at need.

No doubt some of these techniques, developed for individual encounters, would be unsuited for a line. Despite the melees and wars, we have not had sufficient opportunity to work on massed tactics. And then there is the matter of cavalry, entirely unexplored—and its coordination with men-at-arms, archers, slingers, catapults—and nothing has been done yet, either, about naval engagements and Viking raids—but all this should come in due course, as the Society for Creative Anachronism progresses ever further, onward and upward into the Middle Ages.



# **THE HEROIC- FANTASY STORY**



## ... AND STRANGE- SOUNDING NAMES

by  
MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

PROBABLY ONE OF the greatest lures of fantasy, for a certain type of reader, is the strange procession of "faraway places and strange-sounding names." They exercise a fascination which is not unusual at all. Only the most mundane mind and pedestrian soul can fail to thrill at the sound of the array of purely this-worldly "faraway places": Otaheite, Nepal, Cape Horn, the Sargasso Sea. And long before the tradition of fantasy was firmly established, Rider Haggard and others who wrote of lost worlds right here on this earth were fascinating their audiences with the City of Silent Men, the Amahaggar, the "Rock that is shaped like the head of an Ethiopian," and so forth.

But this sort of thing can be carried much too far. A recent trend in fantasy and science fiction is to give every alien culture a procession of undistinguishable or undecipherable names. When I open the pages of a science fiction novel and discover that the robotlike female inhabitants of the

strange world of X-2B14 are tagged Woman-sub-oneA, Woman-sub-twoB, and so forth, I start losing interest very fast. The same thing applies when some writer, in the interests of reproducing the "alien sound" of an unknown world, gives his characters such names as—well, out of charity, I will refrain from copying and instead show you what I mean by speaking of the kind of aliens who are dubbed with such names as Xyxtylzyzlta and Waxtzlyztylta and Sytzzylzta. This sort of thing may very accurately reproduce the conditions we will find on alien worlds, but it drives the reader mad, and furthermore, it is very likely that if we do come into contact with such a race of people with unpronounceable names, we will very soon start calling them "Zixie," "Waxy," and "Sizzy."

On the other hand, there is the kind of writer who uses so little imagination or forethought that he might as well name his aliens "Smith" and "Jones." (This is the "Oog, son of Ug" school of thought.)

When I first started thinking about writing fantasy myself, I was rather deeply under the spell of Robert W. Chambers and of Henry Kuttner, and this, doubtless, has influenced my thinking along the lines of the names I give my characters. Back in my early teens I fell under the fascination of *The King in Yellow*, and such strange names as Hastur and Cassilda, the lost city of Carcosa, the Lake of Hali, haunted my thinking for so many years that almost imperceptibly they slid into my own private mythos. Not until—in high school—I began studying Spanish literature did I realize where Robert W. Chambers had found his "strange names." My first fanzine article (in a happily defunct hektographed format) was writ-

ten to hint that "Casilda" is a well-known Spanish woman's name; that "Hastur" is probably a corruption of "Asturias"—the only Spanish province never to surrender to the Moors and to retain its ancient character; that Carcosa hints curiously at the walled and mysterious city of Carcassonne, and that "Hali," the mysterious cloud-lake of the "King in Yellow," is an Arabic word (Moorish influence on Spanish culture) for the constellation of Taurus, in which are located the star Aldebaran, and the Hyades, which play so great a part in the "Carcosa mythos."

Simple? Yes. Disappointing once explained? I don't think so. Chambers was very deeply under the spell, at that time, of a new school of Impressionist writing which had spread through France and Spain, leaving behind it such writers as Valle-Inclan. The style of most of the short stories in *The King in Yellow* can be translated into Spanish without shifting a word, whereas the idioms are French (not surprising, since he wrote them as a student in Paris). Is it startling, then, that, invoking this curiously Spanish-French fantastic atmosphere, he used, consciously or unconsciously, names which would invoke the ghosts of the Pyrenees, the endless war between Moorish pagan and sternly tenacious Spain? Very few people consciously know anything about Moorish Spain or Carcassonne. Yet how great is the stream of human consciousness? Somewhere, lying at the back of all human experience, lies some random experience to invoke the ghosts by their chosen symbols.

I am going to cite two more examples of what I consider happy naming in fantastic stories. Jack Vance once wrote a collection of loosely con-

nected short stories called *The Dying Earth*. He uses a few fantastic names, but relies mostly on English words, put together in strange ways, to invoke the thoughts he wishes to call up in his readers. "The Cape of Sad Remembrance . . . where a young witch with green hair waited at night for that which was washed in from the sea . . ." has lived in my mind long after most of the strangely named characters have vanished from it. And in his well-known fantastic story *The Dark World*, which I cite simply because I know it so well, Kuttner uses a string of very familiar names culled from the mythology of all worlds: Medea, Ganelon, Edeyrn, Ghast, Rhymi, Freydis, Llyr. The very familiarity of these names in an alien setting suggests that the "dark world" has some tenacious and meaningful tie with our own world of legendry and myth. For the "dark world," of course, is the dark human mind, the submerged subconscious, filled with shifting racial images. There is also a hint here of Tennyson's wistful poem, "Tithonus":

A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes  
A glimpse of that dark world where I was  
born;  
Once more the old mysterious glimmer  
steals . . .

It is, of course, that "mysterious glimmer" which the writer of fantasy wishes to capture and preserve; we who write science and fantasy fiction are stringing together words like beads to weave a very fragile air-castle, and the least hint of impatience on the reader's part with some wildly inept

or difficult name can make the whole thing collapse. My only impatience with E. E. Smith's marvelous "Lensman" stories came when I was forced to stop and think which alien was Worsel and which one was Tregonsee.

So when I began writing fantasy, I took myself by the scruff of the neck and asked myself, clearly and in a loud voice: what should an alien world sound like?

Among other things, I decided, it ought to be pronounceable. And the names of all the people on it should be pronounceable. And the names ought to suggest—at least—whether the recipient of the name is male or female. It is irritating to have to file away a liquid and feminine-sounding name (our language-patterns make feminine names, usually, softer-sounding than men's) as the name of a male. A Martian male may very well be named Amitra—but glancing at it casually, a reader habituated to English sounds will be confused by the similarity to Anitra, and even if Amitra-the-Martian turns out to have a twelve-inch beard and seven wives, the impression may persist that he is female.

Personally, rather than "inventing" names, I prefer to see ordinary syllables combined in new ways. Some readers may think this pedestrian of me. For instance, I consider it a happy inspiration which named the major planet of my Terran Empire stories "Darkover." Two English words—"dark" and "over"—make the name easily pronounceable. A fast elision makes it "Dark cover," and I have attempted to preserve this illusion by speaking here and there of the fast-falling shadows which cover that world with a dim red sun and red skies. To me, the name is both strange

and familiar, and also suggestive. And judging by my fan mail, other people find it about the same.

The dictionaries and their various supplements—even that book on “What to name the baby” — are full of names which may strike the casual reader as vaguely familiar (actually this familiarity adds to ease in reading—as I pointed out, pagesful of Zyxytygl remarking to Wquygyl what he did to Mqrxty get awfully tedious) and yet “different” enough.

In my first printed novelette, “Centaurus Changeling,” I succumbed to a temptation to use “wildly alien” names: Rai Jeth-San, Nethle, Wilidh. (And if anyone can figure out how to pronounce that one, you tell me.) But Cassiana dominated the story, and I am firmly convinced that her memorability lay, in part, in a simple, suggestive name. The “Cass” part suggests Cassandra—a name of Greek-tragic intensity. The “Anna” at the close is feminine and universal. And tragic and feminine were the two things I meant to make of Cassiana.

When I was working on *The Door Through Space* for Bob Mills, the hero’s original name (as those who read fanzines remember) was Lew Marcy. In one of his letters, Mills suggested that I change the hero’s name to “something a trifle stronger.” At first I couldn’t understand what he meant. Then it struck me. Lew, of course is short for Lewis; but spoken or sounded, it sounds like Lou—a distinctly feminine name—and Marcy is also a girl’s name. This tough scarred *hombre* no more needed a name like Lou Marcy than he needed a name like Percy Smithers. I picked “Cargill” because of its rather guttural sound, like the embittered hero’s voice then, casting about for



a suitable name, and discarding many, reinforced the sound of "Cargill" with "Race." Not till long after did I become conscious that "Race" is perhaps the only tolerable nickname for "Horace"—and that a fellow who had to cope with a Christian name like Horace would wind up just such a toughie as Race.

To recap, then: "alien" names can be alien without being either unpronounceable—or pedestrian. What could be simpler, for instance, than "Shambleau"—on the surface just random syllables—or more unconsciously complex when you think of the shambles she caused for Northwest Smith?

And come to think of it, what could be simpler than *Northwest Smith* as a name for a rambling Earthman?

Or more effective?



## ONE MAN'S BEM

by  
R. BRETNOR

THERE IS SCARCELY a question on which fantasy and science fiction fans disagree quite as enthusiastically as they do on illustrations. Some want them everywhere. Others want them never. But very few people, fans or professionals, stop to consider the whys and wherefores of the subject, the reasons for and against illustrative art, generally and in individual cases.

Personally, even though I have thoroughly enjoyed lots of specific science fiction and fantasy illustrations, I have always been strongly against the general use of illustrations in the field. For a long time, I didn't know quite why I felt this way; then I began to look into the matter. The result is in this article, and I hope it will be of interest, not only to readers and writers, but most especially to editors and artists. What it attempts to do, essentially, is to examine some of the functions of illustration, and in terms of this to suggest when and where it should and should not be used.

Any story, long or short, fantasy or science fiction or "straight" literature, is a symbolic structure. The characters, situations, and actions it contains have no existence in the world outside our skulls and skins. They are synthesized within the writer's mind from the materials of his past experience, direct and vicarious; and he chooses a succession of linguistic symbols with which to convey those of their characteristics which he abstracts from the imagined entirely. The function of these words, and hence the function of the story as a whole, is evocative. They must draw from the stored experience of the reader emotions, sensations, and visual images which approximate those which the author has attempted to record—and the effectiveness with which they do so is an accurate measure of his talent.

What this means, of course, is that there is a separate Mr. Pickwick for each reader of the "Papers," that the incarnations of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are as numerous as the grand total of (even temporary) Baker Street Irregulars, and that there are as many Becky Sharps, Rawdon Crawleys, and Marquesses of Steyne as *Vanity Fair* has readers—to say nothing of the Hobbit, of Swelter and Steerpike, of Gorice XII in Carcë, or of the Mule. The fact that these characters would be instantly recognizable if made flesh does not deny this; it is simply a tribute to the ability of their authors. It also explains why none of them really needs an illustrator to show him as a walking, breathing, feeling human being—though if the reader is ignorant of the costumes of, for example, Thackeray's time, the illustrator may serve a useful purpose by informing him.

This leads us to what is certainly the major

paradox of illustrating—that the stories which least need it are sometimes those which can be illustrated most effectively, simply because their evocative power operates as effectively on the artist as on the reader, so that his work (if he is competent and if the frames of reference are familiar) will at least approximate what the writer had in mind, and will not clash too radically with the reader's evoked mental image.

Cruikshank's and Boz's illustrations to Dickens's works may be taken as a case in point. Dominated by the milieu with which they deal, and guided by a perceptive, forceful writer, they are indeed echoes rather than interpretations. Although they are unnecessary, they enrich the story as it is realized in the reader's mind, making it a more perfect whole.

Such a phenomenon is rare enough in fantasy and almost unknown in science fiction. Especially in the latter, the milieu may be much more than merely unfamiliar; it may be strange in almost every detail, and the beings who move within it may be alien in form and foreign to humanity in their thought processes. Actually, of course, their difference from us is almost always superficial in that it is derived by contrast from various terrestrial norms, so that most of our creations, even though removed from us by several steps, must still reflect us. However, despite this, both beings and background usually are unfamiliar enough so that the reader, instead of drawing on a common store of generally accepted images in order to recreate them, is compelled to choose their component parts more or less arbitrarily from his personal stockpile. What are little BEMs\*

\*Bug-eyed monsters.

made of? Slugs and snails and puppydogs' tails almost certainly, and everything else besides. And one man's BEM is another man's God-knows-what—even without considering the BEM's bride, his bed and board, or BEMburgers.

Now, even in the illustration of a conventional story, there are many pitfalls for the artist. Only too often, however expertly the characters are delineated on the printed page, he makes such dreadful errors as drawing an allegedly nubile heroine with the exact smirk of your pet-hate schoolteacher, or making the hero (who ought to look like you) into a carbon-copy of a much-too-successful rival in love. More frequently, he robs them of all individuality by drawing stereotypes as trite as anything produced by Hollywood and as emotionally monochromatic as Mr. Disney's sickly sweet creations—and inevitably destructive, therefore, of the reader's evoked images. For that small minority of readers who have no powers of visualization whatsoever, even such illustrations may of course be helpful, but for those more normally endowed they can never be anything but a hindrance.

And now, having come this far, perhaps we can try to outline a few general principles applicable to the illustration of all forms of literature.

First, then, stories dealing with very sharply defined characters in a culturally familiar setting can usually be illustrated more or less successfully by first-rate artists.

There are exceptions—when the author, for example, sees things in so personal a light that normally familiar characters in a familiar milieu are themselves transmuted into something previously unknown, acquiring entirely new dimen-

sions. (For this reason, the works of Isaak Dinesen should never suffer illustration, because it must inevitably destroy their magic, for some readers if not for all.)

Another exception occurs when the characters themselves, with or without their close environment, are once-removed from the familiar—plucked out of it and plumped down in some strange unheard-of order into a new world where different rules pertain. (This is the case in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, two books which almost certainly would lose by illustration.)

Actually, there is nothing really unfamiliar in *Seven Gothic Tales* or *Winter's Tales*, or in Mervyn Peake's two wonderful fantasies. Any reasonably well-read person has the materials from which to recreate their people, places, decisions, and peculiar destinies—and yet each reader, working with his share of the common heritage, produces something so intensely personal that it defies the painter.

Therefore we can say that there is a class of stories which no artist, however able, should try to illustrate, at least in the literal sense, except perhaps in relatively small editions designed to appeal to special tastes and unlikely to fall into the hands of first-time readers.

In this class, however, there are stories which, though they cannot tolerate any literal representation of characters, scenes, and episodes, can be enriched by the skillful illustration of pervading mood of their theme or period, or even of the artist's special response to it. As example, we can take Keith Henderson's grand decorations to *The Worm Ouroboros* and to *Styrbiorn the Strong*, and at an almost opposite pole, Pauline Diana

Baynes's cheerful evocations of a fabulously medieval dragon-hunting England in her illustrations to Tolkien's charming *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Boris Artzybasheff's drawings for the original edition of *The Circus of Dr. Lao* fall into the same category. (To take an example from an entirely different field, a rather similar effect was produced by those sets of the French countryside and its castles which did so much to create the special atmosphere of Olivier's *Henry V*; by making no attempt at realism, by taking castles and all directly from the illuminated manuscripts of the period, the motion picture succeeded in presenting the fifteenth century in terms already familiar to any literate audience, and thereby achieved a degree of verisimilitude which de Mille's copying millions never could have produced.

From one extreme, we go to another, and find a class of stories—by no means a very numerous one—which either are nothing without their illustrations because these are an essential part of them, or else, despite their own intrinsic merit, have been so identified with a given set of illustrations that it is hard to think of one without the other. Many children's books (some of which, of course, are designed primarily to amuse adults) fall into the first category; Lawson and Leaf's famous *Ferdinand* is a prime specimen. As for those designed for adult readers especially, one of the best examples, at least to my way of thinking, is a book that is virtually unknown: Frederick J. Waugh's *The Clan of Munes*. The munes were roughly—very roughly—of human form. A Northwest Coast Indian wizard created them out of such substances as gnarled driftwood, and the motifs of the Northwest tribes dominate the illus-



trations, particularly the splendid color-plates. Waugh was a very well known painter, and this was his only book, but in it he succeeded in doing what every writer of fantasy and science fiction must try to do—in the achieving the creation of an entirely new and yet completely coherent world out of the materials of actuality. Unfortunately, *The Clan of Munes* is long out of print, and Scribner's, which published it in 1916, inform me that only a few hundred copies were sold, and that the plates are no longer in existence.

The second category is something of a puzzler, because sometimes story and illustrations can be so completely wedded that it is almost impossible to determine the original flavor of the story without its illustrations, or whether they have indeed helped or hurt it. Thus, I personally can hardly imagine *Alice in Wonderland* without Sir John Tenniel's drawings; nor can I see *Toad of Toad Hall* and the rest of the company of *The Wind in the Willows* except through the eyes of Arthur Rackham.

All these examples of illustrations in one way or another essential to their stories are of course exceptional, but they do serve to demonstrate that there are three kinds of successful illustrations: those which echo the author's purpose so faithfully that they do not clash with the images his words evoke; those which do something which the story fails to do, and which badly needs doing; and those which, through sheer genius, unexpectedly combine with the story to make something new and better.

In science fiction illustration especially, it is often impossible for an artist to echo the author's purpose with such complete fidelity that there

will be no conflict between the image on the paper and that in the reader's mind, simply because—as I have pointed out—the evoked images will be so various. Once, for instance, I wrote a story in which a large, friendly beast came lolloping in to accompany a guitar solo by whistling through its long Roman nose. It was reddish, fuzzy, and had very large feet. To my mind—and, I thought, to the minds of the rest of the world—such a critter would be nothing else than a quadruped, and whether it looked like a moose or a big springer spaniel was purely a matter of taste. But when the story finally appeared, I was surprised to find it an oversized anthropoid ape with a face like a subway guard's.

Even if we leave out extraterrestrial life forms, the science fiction illustrator can make quite enough errors peculiar to the field. One of these concerns women. I sometimes suspect that at least eighty percent of our BEM-and-fem covers are done by young artists who (like their medieval predecessors when it came to lions) have heard of undressed women but have never seen one. (Perhaps we ought to start a fund?) Another common fault is the failure to read the story before illustrating it, a procedure which results in some remarkable art work; this is fairly common in all fields, but it's a little more serious in science fiction. A third error is the lack, not only of technical knowledge on the part of the artist, but of any awareness of the transient nature of technologies generally, so that future civilizations are shown using either completely anachronistic present-day gadgets or completely unconvincing developments of them.

Not all magazines using illustrations are, of

course, equally guilty in permitting these sins, and there is one especially in which the illustrations appear to be as carefully edited as the text, and in which the occasional use of subdued suggestion rather than broad depiction is very pleasing. Even this, however, is a negative argument, which scarcely alters the case against science fiction illustration as a general practice. The rules which usually govern illustration apply even more rigorously to fantasy than to ordinary literature, and even more strictly to science fiction than to fantasy. It is harder for the science fiction illustrator to avoid conflicting with the reader's mental images. It is extremely difficult for him—except within the limits of the Chesley Bonestell school—to supply any lack inherent in the story. And it is certainly as unlikely as it is in any other field that he will produce a work of genius which will unite the story illustrated into a single masterpiece.

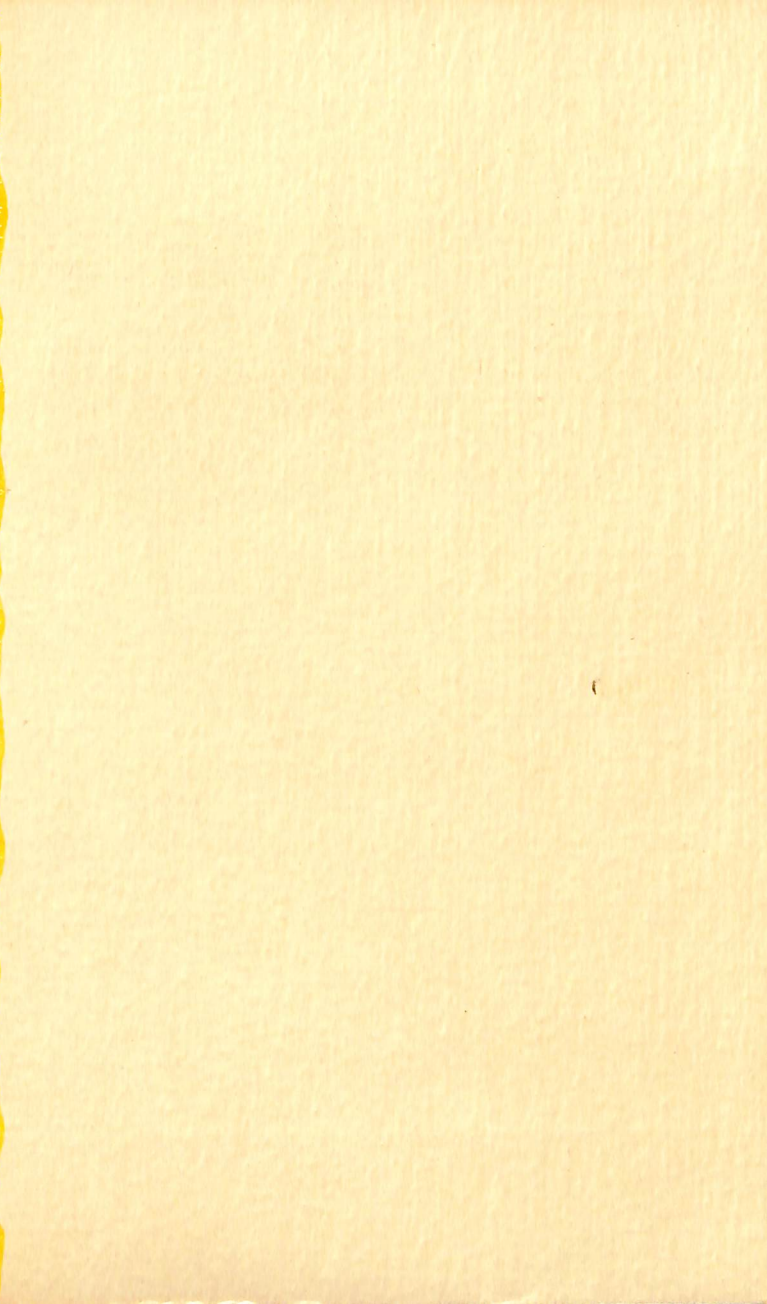
Yet there is always the chance that he may do so—and that alone would be reason enough for the publication of a great many illustrated science fiction books and magazines. Besides, there are people who enjoy and demand lots of illustrations, just as there are others who enjoy and demand none at all. And there is certainly room for both in the world.

Only I wish that other people's BEMs would look more like my BEMs.

*The all-time prize for illustratorial carelessness goes to C. C. Senf, who illustrated Robert E. Howard's story "The Footfalls Within" in Weird Tales for September 1931. This is a story about Howard's hero Solomon Kane, an English Puritan of the*

closing years of the reign of Elizabeth I. At the start, Kane is defending himself with his rapier against a band of Arabs, who are attacking him in an oasis in the Sahara. Hastily running his eye over the manuscript, Senf perceived that the story concerned an African conflict between an Englishman and some Arabs; but, not taking time to pick up the meager clues to the story's period, he showed Kane brandishing his rapier, all right, but otherwise clad in the garb, not of 1600, but of 1900, with peg-topped riding breeches, spiral puttees, and a solar topi or tropical pith helmet!

L. Sprague de Camp



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